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Bears not each human figure the godlike stamp on his forehead?
Readest thou not in his face thine origin? Is he not sailing
Lost like thyself on an ocean unknown, and is he not guided
By the same stars that guide thee? * * * * * *
Think of thy brother no ill, but throw a veil over his failings:
This is the fruit of love, and it is by its fruits that we know it.

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ATHERSTONE PRIORY.

CHAPTER I.

LISA.

'WHAT time did Mary say they would be here, Helen?' asked Dr. Tennent, walking, one cold afternoon in February, into the drawing-room at Atherstone Priory, and standing there while he buttoned up his great-coat in preparation for meeting the keen biting north wind which was whistling drearily without the house. 'What time did she say they would get here? Seven o'clock, was it?'

'No, six, I believe—unless indeed they have changed their minds again since she last wrote, which is not at all improbable. I do wish,' continued Mrs. Tennent, laying down her work for a moment to stir the fire, 'I do wish, when people fix days and hours for coming to a place, they would keep to them. There is nothing I dislike more than such perpetual changes, and Mary

knows it. I think she might have shown a little more thought.'

'My dear, I don't see how she could help it,' returned the doctor, apologetically; 'I don't think it was her fault. And really, I can't tell exactly what difference it makes whether they come to-day or to-morrow. It is not as if Percy were a stranger, and obliged to stand upon ceremony with us. The great thing is to get him here as quickly as possible; and if he is able to travel sooner than we expected, so much the better. London lodgings are wretched places at such times, and there's no doubt he will be glad enough to find himself at home again.'

There was no answer to this. Percy was not Mrs. Tennent's son, and therefore it was not to be expected that she could enter so entirely into his father's feelings of satisfaction at his return after a long absence, as to exclude all other considerations. She had fixed and decided opinions also upon certain subjects; and these opinions were not to be trifled with at any time, as everybody knew, or ought to have known. She went on with her work now in a grave determined way, which said, as plainly as anything could say, that she was not pleased, and Dr. Tennent fidgeted about the room for a few minutes, as if he would have liked to say something else, but was not quite sure how it would be taken.

'Are you going out again?' his wife asked at last, looking up.

'Yes, but not far; only to Mrs. Gunning's. I promised to meet Symonds there at five o'clock. It

must be nearly that now.' But although he made this announcement, the doctor seemed in no hurry to take his departure.

'I heard from John to-day,' he said abruptly, after another long silence.

'Did you? I am surprised at that. It is so long since he wrote, that I thought he had dropped the acquaintance. But I suppose he is on his road home again, and thinks it time to find out old friends.'

'I don't know; he says nothing about coming back. He is at Wiesbaden now.'

'At Wiesbaden! And what is he doing there, I wonder? He had much better return to England. I can't see the use of people wandering about all over the world, when they have duties at home to attend to. He ought to be looking after his affairs here, instead of running after pleasure abroad.'

'Perhaps so,' was the answer, in rather an absent tone. 'I don't know, though, Helen'—after a pause, and with something of an effort—'I don't know that his roving disposition has not been of some use this time. Certainty of any kind is better than suspense; and our doubts about Emily Kennedy are set at rest now for ever.'

Mrs. Tennent started. 'Emily Kennedy! What do you mean? He has not heard of her?'

'Yes, he has—yes, he has.' And the doctor folded his arms and gazed abstractedly into the fire; 'and

perhaps it was the best thing that could have been heard of her,' he went on at length. 'She is dead, Helen; she died six months ago at Wiesbaden. There can be no doubt of it, for although she went under another name, the chaplain's account of her, and the things they found, prove it most certainly. There is John's letter. You will see how he first got the clue, and I am glad he followed it up. It is a relief to know that it is all over.'

'Yes, indeed it is,' was Mrs. Tennent's answer, in a low and bitter tone, as she glanced over the contents of the note her husband handed to her. 'And the sooner she is forgotten now, the better. Better still it would be if we could forget she had ever lived; but that is impossible.'

'Poor Emily!' sighed the doctor; 'poor Emily! Who would have thought it? So gay and happy as she used to be! So merry and light-hearted! She was the beauty of the place then—the prettiest girl in all the country round, far and near. Lisa takes after her in that—she has all her mother's good looks; but we must hope she will have a happier life of it, poor child.' And once more he fell into deep thought.

A laugh outside the window roused him—a clear, ringing, joyous laugh it was: but it seemed to strike him painfully just then. He looked up quickly.

'What do you intend to do about her?' he asked, his eye following the figure of a young girl who was running

across the lawn. 'About Lisa, I mean. Will you tell her?'

'Tell her! What are you thinking of, Dr. Tennent? Of course I shall not tell her. What would be the use of it? She never asks after her. I have never even heard her mention her name. Most probably she supposes her to have been dead for years; and what good would it do to enlighten her now? She can't profess to care much for a person whom she can hardly remember; and we should never dream of putting her into mourning or ourselves either, so that she had much better know nothing about it. Most certainly I shall not tell her.'

'Very well,' said the doctor, who generally deferred to his wife's opinion; 'very well, do as you like about it; it is sure to be right, whatever you settle; and of course it can make no difference to her. She has a home here, and a great blessing for her that she has, poor child. And we are not sorry to have her—eh, Helen? She is a good little girl, is Lisa, and very affectionate. We shall hardly like to part with her, I think, when the time comes for her to go.'

Mrs. Tennent coughed. 'Lisa may be what you say; I don't know. But it seems to me that if she were as fond of us as you fancy, she would show it more in her actions. I don't care for words only; and as far as I am concerned, I must say that she gives me a great deal more trouble than all my own children put together. She is careless and forgetful, and very wilful; and she

takes no pains to improve in any way. I thought I could have depended on her, while Mary was away, to go on working at her own studies regularly, and to keep Susan and Constance to theirs; but she has done nothing of the kind; and whether she has ever even opened a book this last month, I don't know. There has been no order, no method of any sort, in the school-room; and considering that she is nearly sixteen now, it really is too bad to think that I cannot trust her. I mean to speak to her this evening, and tell her how displeased I am. She is too old to go on in the childish, thoughtless way that she has been doing, caring for nothing but play and amusement. It is my firm belief that, if she could race up and down the garden all day with the dog, or shoot sparrows with Arthur, and play at cricket and foot-ball, or some other equally lady-like game with him and the boys, she would be quite content, and never ask for anything better. And she is incorrigible, she pays no attention to what I say to her; if I were to scold for ever it would make no difference. It is thoroughly disheartening to have anything to do with her.'

'She does well enough when Mary is here,' said Dr. Tennent, in a tone of excuse. 'You can't find fault with her then, my dear. She goes on very well when Mary is at home.'

'I beg your pardon, I don't think so. But even if she did, I don't see what good that would do. She can't have Mary to look after her all her life, and what

is to become of her in two or three years' time, when she has to go out as a governess? Who will trust her with their children, I should like to know, when she can't even be trusted to look after herself? It is ridiculous to talk as you do, Dr. Tennent. But I shall speak to her this evening; and very seriously too. I shall tell her exactly what I have thought of her behaviour these last few weeks.'

'Well, well, do as you think best; only don't be too hard upon her, Helen,' said the doctor, beginning to fidget again. He never liked to hear that his little niece was to be found fault with, although it must be confessed that this fault-finding process was one of such frequent occurrence that he ought to have been well accustomed to it by this time. 'She is only a child, after all; and we must remember that she has no father—and no mother now,' he added, with some emphasis. 'We must not let her think us unkind.'

'No one wishes to be unkind,' said Mrs. Tennent, drily. 'But it strikes me that you would be if you had your own way. It would be very great unkindness to let her go on as she is doing now; though I quite believe you would if you could do as you like; and all because you are afraid of being thought unkind.'

Dr. Tennent smiled a little. 'Perhaps I should; but I have not the chance, you see. However, I daresay, you will not have so much cause for complaint now. Arthur goes to-morrow, you know, and they will none

en, you say. We must mind what we
en, or we shall have him falling in love v
n before he knows what he is doing.
summer we had better let him pay Ralp
nsford, instead of coming here. I don't
been there half-a-dozen times since his fa
he ought to see more of his brother. W
k? It would be a good plan, wouldn't it
Perhaps so.' Mrs. Tennent liked plans in
inate with herself. 'But it will be time e
of that when the summer comes. It wou
ad thing, certainly, for him to see mo
her; but Ralph and Janet are most likely e
nen, so that he will meet them here. An
nything else is concerned, I see no reason
to his visits. I have no fear of any lov
reen him and the girls. When young peo
ogether, they very seldom dream of such
know each other too well for

She spoke decidedly, and as if the question were settled; but the doctor, contrary to his usual custom, did not appear to be quite convinced.

'I don't know; one does hear of such things sometimes, and it would be rather awkward if it should happen. It seems a pity, indeed, to throw them in the way of temptation; for as he has very little but his profession to look to, it would be years before they could marry, even if——'

'Even if they should ever want to do so, which they never will. For supposing that Arthur were to take a liking to one of them, it would never go very far. He knows well enough what his prospects are, and that he could not keep a wife at present. He will have something to do to keep himself first—curates without private means can't afford to marry—and by the time he gets a living, Elinor, I hope, will be well settled, and Lisa will be out of his way, and he will have seen some one he likes better than either of them—some one with whom he has not lived half his life, and does not know a quarter so well, but whom he will love, or fancy he loves, ten times more on that very account. I know what young people are, Dr. Tennent, and how very little danger there is of any such thing happening as you suppose. Of course, however, if I saw it beginning, I should put a stop to it at once.'

'Very well,' said the doctor submissively. 'I only hope you will find it out in good time, if it ever does

happen. I should not like any of them to be made unhappy for want of a little common caution on our part; but you will look after them, I have no doubt—they could not be in better hands, indeed. And now I'm off. Past five o'clock, I declare, and I ought to be in Hammond Place.' And catching up his hat he disappeared, upsetting a chair in his hurry, and nearly running over his daughter Elinor, who was just coming into the room as he ran out of it.

Dr. Tennent was one of the leading medical men in the large and populous manufacturing town of Atherstone, and had an extensive and rapidly increasing practice, not only in the town itself and its immediate neighbourhood, but for many miles round, among the county families. His father and grandfather had both occupied the same position before him, and had been universally liked and respected by all who knew them; and he himself seemed to have inherited no small share of their popularity. He was a leading man in the place also in other ways, besides those connected with his profession, for his coadjutorship was sought for and given on all sorts of occasions, and there were few schemes of usefulness or benevolence carried out in the town, of which he was not either the originator, or a promoter and active supporter. How he found time for all he did, and how he accomplished so much without wearing himself out, was a perpetual wonder to everyone who knew him. But he had a never-failing amount of

energy and spirit, and was one of those hardy, wiry men who appear capable of getting through any given quantity of business without danger of breaking down; and nobody had ever yet heard him complain of being overworked. He was up early and late, in and out at all hours, and hardly knew what it was to have a few quiet minutes at home, so incessant were the demands made upon him both by rich and poor; and of these two classes, the latter had by no means the fewest of his thoughts. The rich could always find a doctor, he said, but those who were not so well off, were not so sure of having sufficient attention paid to them; and the poor, having once found that they had a friend in him, were not slow in taking advantage of the discovery; nor was it often that he was too busy to attend to even the most inconvenient and ill-timed of their demands.

It was well for him that he had a wife who was both able and willing to take the management of his family off his hands, and who never troubled him with domestic arrangements or domestic disagreeables, but left him at liberty to pursue his avocations undisturbed, and went her own way to work without asking either for advice or approbation. And as long as he saw his children well and happy, he was quite content that it should be so, and never cared to enquire particularly as to what went on during his absence. Mrs. Tennent, indeed, was not a person to brook interference, even from her husband, and was fully competent to undertake the charge of any

sized household without assistance. A far larger one than that she had to manage would have been no burden to her, although her present establishment was by no means small. She had seven children of her own, and the doctor, who had been twice married, had also a son and daughter by his first wife. It was true that the son, who was in the army, and had been absent from England a great deal, could hardly be said to make one of the family; but his place was pretty well filled by a nephew of Mrs. Tennent's, who, first as a schoolboy, and now as a young man at college, had long been in the habit of making her house his home whenever he wanted one. An orphan niece of the doctor's also lived with them, and completed the number of the regular and recognised members of the household, but not at all that of the stray friends and relations, who, with or without invitation, found their way there at all times, and stayed as long as they liked. People from the country coming into Atherstone for business or pleasure, thought the Priory a very convenient place for luncheon, dinner, or a bed, and generally availed themselves of it; while anybody from any part of the world, who could lay claim to the remotest degree of relationship with the doctor, was always sure of a hearty welcome at his house; for he was very hospitable, and liked nothing better than to see plenty of faces and hear cheerful voices about him.

His house was a large one, and, like his practice, had been handed down to him from his grandfather;

but what had, in the first Dr. Tennent's time, been a pleasant suburban—almost indeed country—residence, with green meadows, sunny banks, and wooded land lying round it, was now situated in the centre of a crowded and not very aristocratic district, and all that remained of its once rural aspect was a large, well-planted garden at the back—the especial delight of the younger members of the family, and not less so, though in a different way, of their elders. The house itself, called the Priory, from the fact of its standing upon the site of what had formerly been a monastic building, was a rambling and rather old-fashioned place, full of small, low-pitched rooms upstairs, and large, but equally low and inconvenient rooms, below. Mrs. Tennent declared that many of them were not habitable, and that do what she would in the way of furnishing and ornamenting, nothing ever made them even decently comfortable. But nobody else seemed to think so; on the contrary, they were always well filled, and everyone in general contrived to make themselves very happy there.

If laughter and merriment, indeed, are to be taken as signs of happiness, there was always plenty of it to be found at the Priory; nor was that cold February day any exception to the general rule, as was testified by the ringing voices and gay shouts of a party on the lawn, who all that afternoon had been eager with the excitement of a game at snow-balling, and who even

now, when the evening was fast closing in, seemed in no hurry to forgo their apparently delightful amusement. The outward aspect of things was certainly not enlivening; but fortunately for them, their spirits were not easily affected by trifles; and although the neighbouring red-brick houses, with their roofs covered with blackened snow, looked drearily desolate, and the old tower of the Priory church close by rose dark against the leaden sky; and though the leafless boughs of the lime-trees in the garden were frosted with ice, and the air was gloomy with another coming storm, they seemed to find no drawback to their enjoyment in these circumstances, and only played on all the faster and more merrily, as the gathering shades of twilight warned them that they would soon have to give up their game. They had raised a parapet of snow between some trees and the garden wall, and behind this Arthur Darrell (who in spite of his having attained the age of manhood, and being at college, was by no means above finding amusement with boys and girls) had entrenched himself with his two little cousins, Susan and Constance. They were all three engaged in a vigorous defence of their fortress against a no less vigorous attempt to dislodge them from it which was being made by Fred and Charley—boys of fourteen and twelve—aided by Lisa Kennedy, the latter by no means the least excited and energetic of the party.

With her dress tucked up, her hat falling off, and

her hair in wild disorder, she danced about, the gayest of them all, little dreaming of the news that had come that day, or of the sad fate of the mother of whom she often thought, but whose life had so long been shrouded in mystery. There was no shadow on her face; no trace of sadness in the clear tones of her voice, and her laugh was merriment itself; careless unthinking merriment, as if no such things as doubt or sorrow had ever crossed her path. With all the childish earnestness that always characterised her pursuit of any pleasure, she was absorbed now in her game, and had not a thought for anything beyond the amusement of the moment. Darting backwards and forwards, gathering up the snow in handfuls, and aiming it with unerring precision at the besieged party, she proved herself quite as formidable an antagonist, and entered fully as much into the spirit of the thing as either of her boy-cousins, being as reckless as they were of the balls which Arthur ruthlessly and most ungallantly flung back at her with no sparing hand, greeting each successive one with fresh peals of mirth, and only pausing from time to time to brush the snow from her dress, or collect new supplies for another attack. Taking advantage at last of a diversion on the part of her fellow assailants, which took off Arthur's attention, she made a rush on the unprotected side of the parapet, and seizing the flag that was fixed there (a stick with a red handkerchief tied to it), she waved it above her head

for a moment with a gay shout of triumph, and jumped down into the enclosure. The other besiegers were not slow in following her example, and a loud hurrah from everybody proclaimed that the fortress was taken. That 'hurrah' brought their amusement to an end, for it roused Mrs. Tennent in the drawing-room from the reverie in which—a most unusual thing for her—she had been indulging over the fire after her husband left her.

'Call them in, Elinor!' she said, looking up; 'I had no idea they were out of doors still. Tell them to come in directly.'

Elinor, a pale, delicate, but rather pretty girl, with blue eyes, and a profusion of dark hair, who was sitting at the window with her head resting on her hand, rose from her seat with evident reluctance, and casting a shivering glance across the lawn, walked slowly from the room. She shivered again as she went into the hall, and taking up a shawl, threw it round her before she gathered courage to face the cold sufficiently to open the garden door and summon the party into the house; although, when she had done so, she did not retreat again at once, but stood there, waiting, it seemed, for them to make their appearance. Some little delay took place before the mandate was obeyed; but at length they came trooping in, all in various stages of indignation at being interrupted in the midst of their delightful occupation. Fred and Charley even went so far as to

vote that their sister ought to be rolled in a snow drift for being the bearer of such unwelcome tidings, while Arthur came behind, dragging on the unwilling Susan and Constance, who were hanging to his coat tails, and uttering lamentable remonstrances. Lisa was the only one who was silent; but that most probably was because she was endeavouring to unfasten a very intricate-looking knot in the strings of her hat, which only seemed to grow tighter from all her attempts to loosen it.

'Well!' she remarked at last, in a tone of despair, 'I suppose I shall have to wear this thing for the rest of my life, for I can't untie it, and I mayn't cut the strings. What can I do, Arthur? Will it look very odd if I go about in this way all my days?'

An appeal at which Arthur turned round, and contemplated her for a moment or two with much gravity, as if he were giving the subject full consideration.

'A-hem!' he said at last; 'well, we won't say anything about the singularity of your appearance. Still, if it's a case of necessity, I think you may make yourself comfortable by the reflection that the appendage, though novel, is not unbecoming. I am not sure, indeed, that you are not improved by it rather than otherwise—eh, Nelly, what do you say? Only —excuse me—you might look a little more easy and natural. At present you have the appearance of being in —what shall I call it—in decidedly embarrassed circumstances.

'And so I am, for I am nearly choked. Oh Arthur, it was one of your snow-balls that knocked it off, and it would only be charitable of you to help me out of my difficulties, instead of standing there laughing at me.'

'Admiring you, you mean. But why didn't you pull it on again when I knocked it off, and then you would never have been in these dreadful difficulties. Let me see, though, what I can do. I lay any wager I'll have it off in half a second.' And before Lisa could stop him, he had his fingers under the string, and the hat in his hand, much to her astonishment, although she exclaimed in some consternation, when she saw a deplorable slit in the hat itself, in consequence of the ribbon having been violently torn from the straw.

'And a lot of my hair he has taken too! Quite a handful, I declare! What a wretch you are, Arthur; and look what a hole you have made here! I don't know what aunt Helen will say when she sees it. I shall get such a scolding.'

'Nonsense, ask Lane to patch it up for you; she'll soon make it right. And it's not much worse than it was before. I've seen the top of it flapping about for the last three weeks, I'm sure. Yes, there it is just coming off. But it is only in keeping with the rest of your dress; you are about one of the most perfect specimens of the tag-rag-and-bobtail tribe that I ever saw.'

There was a glance downwards as he spoke, and Lisa followed the direction of his eye. She certainly did not present a very reputable figure just then, as far as her toilette was concerned, for her boots and stockings were wet through far above her ankles, her petticoat was in the same predicament, besides being adorned with numerous formidable-looking rents, and her dress was torn from the gathers, and trailed on the ground behind her. Her hair, too, had fallen down, and hung over her neck and shoulders in a wet, tangled mass of brown and gold. But in spite of the disadvantages under which she appeared, nothing could detract even then from the rare loveliness of her face and form, and Arthur's glance was one quite as much of admiration as of pretended disdain at the state of her dress. From her earliest childhood, Lisa had been always noted for her extreme beauty—a beauty which would have attracted attention at any time, from its perfectness of feature and delicacy of outline and colouring, but which a brilliant smile and the winning expression of her large hazel eyes rendered irresistible. But she had not yet learned to look for the admiration with which none could help regarding her; and perhaps the utter absence of anything like self-consciouness in all she said and did, was by no means one of her least charms. She did not notice now the look on her cousin's face, being quite engaged instead with examining the state of her attire. As she was well accustomed, however, to

constant fault-finding on that subject, as on many others, she did not seem much alarmed at the prospect of the scolding which was probably in store for her; and after having stuck a pin into the gathers of her dress, and contemplated her tattered petticoat for a few moments, she looked up again with a laugh.

'Never mind, it can't be helped. And a great deal of it was your doing, Arthur. You tore my dress, and you put all that snow in my hair when it tumbled down, and made it so wet. You are not much better, either, yourself. Look at all that mud on your coat—and look at your boots! Oh, he is a figure! isn't he, Nelly?'

'Yes, I think he is; but as far as that goes there is not much to choose between you all,' was the answer. 'You look very much like scarecrows, every one of you—but perhaps you are the worst, Lisa. You always are, though, so that is not surprising. And now I advise you to go and make yourselves respectable before anybody sees you.'

'You are not very complimentary,' retorted Arthur. 'And why didn't you come, Nelly, and make scarecrow number seven, instead of staying indoors in that grand and dignified manner, as if you were too good for us poor mortals. I thought you liked a game as well as anyone.'

'So I do, some games—but not all. And snowballing I can't bear. It makes one so wet.'

'You didn't mind it last winter for all that,' persisted

Arthur; 'you used to join in it then. But I see what it is,' he added, with an odd look. 'It is the coming out that has done it. Now that you are a young lady and introduced, you can't condescend to such trifling amusements. Ah, well—that's the way of the world! Lisa, you see what you will come to by-and-bye. When you arrive at Nelly's age, there will be an end of all fun for you—and for me too. What will become of me, then, I wonder? I shall desert the Priory until I have arrived at years of discretion, and can be a proper companion for all the young ladies I shall find here.'

Elinor coloured a little at this speech, and looked rather stiff and constrained, but Lisa laughed.

'Well, there's plenty of time for you to stay, Arthur; you needn't go just yet. I sha'n't be a grown-up young lady for two years to come; and not then, if I can help it. I like being a child better. Oh, Nelly, we've had the most glorious fun this afternoon! It really was a pity you were not with us; you would have liked it, I know. That was the Redan we were attacking—we were English and Russians. Arthur was Russian—for he didn't mind which he was—but of course Fred and I wouldn't be anything but English; and Charley joined us, so we had to storm the fort. We had such a battle, but we got in at last, though we got some good hard blows before we did. Arthur hits so very hard; it was no joke getting a knock with one of his balls. They were almost as bad as the real Russian bullets, I declare.'

'Not exactly; considering that you look very well and jolly, in spite of all your hard knocks,' remarked Arthur; 'and that's more than you will see Percy doing this evening, I expect. He'll have a different tale to tell you about Russian bullets, Miss Lisa.'

'Yes, indeed' said Elinor with a shudder. 'Don't talk in that way, Lisa, as if fighting were nothing—only playwork, and to be made fun of. You might know better than that; I am sure we have heard enough about it lately. It is dreadful—horrible.'

Arthur laughed, and Lisa opened her eyes. 'Is it? I don't think so. I like to hear about it, and to read of it; and if I were a man I would be a soldier. I wish I were one, and I'd go off directly, and come in for all the fighting. I shouldn't be afraid, I know. I should never think it dreadful. You forget all the glory, Elinor.'

'Ah yes, the glory! that's it,' exclaimed Arthur. That's all she thinks of—

> The combat deepens. On ye brave,
> Who rush to glory or the grave.

Wasn't that what I heard you reciting this morning, Lisa, in the green walk? And she looked so excited that I was quite alarmed. I thought she meant to rush off herself "to glory or the grave." And there was old Bär tramping up and down by her side in a state of perfect bewilderment at her rhapsodies. He

evidently did not know what to make of the scene; and his barks and whines for an explanation of it all were piteous in the extreme.'

'Arthur, you are horrid!' Lisa exclaimed, in intense indignation, and growing very red. She jumped up indeed, intending to stuff a handkerchief into his mouth, but he backed out of her way. 'I didn't know you were there, or I shouldn't have said it aloud at all; and it's a great shame of you now to make fun of me. I'll never speak to you again, if you don't mind.'

'Not till next time,' said Arthur, coolly, and looking at her flashing eyes in much admiration. 'I declare it's a great pity that she's not a soldier, as she wishes—isn't it, Nelly? She'd make a first-rate one. Do you know Lisa, I've been quite sorry for you that there has been no fighting lately. I used to like to see you last year poring over the papers, and growing so hot and excited about everything that went on out there. But lately we've had nothing of the sort; it has been very tame work, and if peace is declared now, as everybody says, what will you do? Happily, Percy will be at home, and you can make a demi-god of him, if you like, on the strength of his having been through it all. That you are prepared, indeed, to worship him, I know perfectly well—I can see it in your face whenever his name is mentioned.'

Lisa stamped the snow from her boots energetically

'I am not prepared to do anything of the sort. I"

leave that for Isabel, when she comes back. She may worship him as much as she pleases—she does already—but I'm sure I shall not. I don't like him; and what is more, I am quite certain that I never shall. I like to hear about fighting, and battles, and—and honour, and glory, and that kind of thing, though you do laugh at me, Arthur, which is very horrid and disagreeable of you. And I like to hear of all the brave things that our soldiers do—but I don't care for Percy one bit, and I don't want to see him—he's not the sort of man that—'

'That you can make a hero of. You want an Adonis for that, and he is not one, most decidedly: I understand.'

'You don't, Arthur; I said nothing about an Adonis or a hero either—you don't know what I mean at all; and I don't want to hear any more,' she added, stopping her ears as he was beginning again, 'I can't stay now—it's just tea-time.'

She marched off, Arthur following her, to her great disgust, and chanting in a solemn voice,

> Few, few shall part, where many meet!
> The snow shall be their winding-sheet;
> And every turf beneath their feet
> Shall mark the soldier's cemetery.

CHAPTER II.

THE LIKENESS IN MARY'S ROOM.

IT was about an hour afterwards, that Mrs. Tennent, who was crossing a landing on her way down-stairs, heard a chorus of voices, accompanied by peals of laughter, proceeding from a room near, which was used as a study, and usually went by the name of 'Mary's room,' because it was there that Mary, the eldest daughter of the family, officiated as governess when she was at home. She was away now, however, having been in London for nearly a month, acting as nurse to her brother, who had been invalided home from the Crimea, and was obliged to remain in town to be under medical care before he was able to travel down to Atherstone. But they were expected home that evening, and apparently it would be no bad thing for some of the party at the Priory to have Mary's quiet but very effectual rule exercised among them again. Mrs. Tennent thought so, certainly, as she opened the door of the room, and not being observed at first, stood a silent spectator of the confusion that prevailed there.

At the top of the table, presiding over the tea-tray, sat Lisa, with her hair still hanging down her back

(left to dry, she said), and on either side of her, with their mouths full of bread and butter, lounged Susan and Constance, in attitudes more easy than elegant, while Arthur, who had turned in for reasons best known to himself, was assisting little George, the year-and-a-half-old baby, to make a circuit round the table among the cups and plates—a performance which was received with vehement applause by Fred and Charley, but which had already been attended by some disasters in the shape of two cups of tea upset, and a plate and saucer broken. The immediate cause of the uproar was George's having set his foot down in the middle of the butter, and the feat had elicited such shouts of laughter from everybody, that he was highly delighted, and seemed very anxious to repeat the exploit. Mrs. Tennent's entrance, however, was in time to prevent this; and her face of grave displeasure, as she walked up to the table, speedily put an end to the commotion.

'You had better let Lane take him away,' she said, coldly; 'if he is the cause of such a disturbance, decidedly he must not stay here. Ring the bell, Constance.'

Constance jumped down from her chair in haste, alarmed at the tone of her mother's voice, and Susan sat bolt upright suddenly, and laid down an enormous piece of bread and butter which had just been about to follow its predecessors, while George puckered up his rosy lips, and finally burst into a howl at not being allowed to walk on the table any more. Arthur looked a little foolish.

'I don't think he has done much damage,' he said, with a glance at the fragments of broken china near him. 'But I'll take him to Lane myself. Don't cry, my man; we'll put you on a pair of clean shoes, and then you shall walk on the floor as much as you like, that will be better than the butter. Keep me another cup of tea Lisa, I shall be back in a minute.'

There was something in his tone, in spite of its would-be penitence, that provoked a titter, which not even the awe inspired by Mrs. Tennent's displeasure could entirely restrain; and although she took no notice of it, his promise of returning probably influenced her next movements, for instead of leaving the room, she drew a chair to the table and sat down, remaining very silent and very grave until they had all finished, and most effectually checking by her presence any more approaches to merriment. The four younger ones did not speak a word, and Arthur, when he came back, and found her still there, drank off his tea in all haste, and then vanished again, much to the dismay of Lisa, who had a feeling of protection as long as he was in the room, and was in secret dread of what might be coming when he went away. Nor were her apprehensions without foundation; for when tea was over, and she was making an attempt to escape unobserved, she was stopped peremptorily, and desired to come back. The others were sent away, and then began a lecture such as Mrs. Tennent alone knew how to administer, and which, accustomed

as Lisa was to such things, was a formidable affair even to her. She stood silent and downcast, while her aunt went through the catalogue of all her misdoings during the last month, and she sighed inwardly as she listened to the long list of offences, most of which had been forgotten as soon as committed, but of which it seemed a strict account had been kept, and which were now brought forth in array against her; while, as a wind-up, Mrs. Tennent recurred to the scene she had just witnessed, which proved, she said, how little her niece was to be trusted in any way. Instead of taking her cousin Mary's place while she was absent, as had been expected of her, and which she was quite old enough to do, she had not even made an attempt to keep order among the others, but on the contrary, had encouraged unruliness of every kind by her own example. But that was not the way to fit herself for the post which, as she well knew, she would one day have to fill. How would she be able to undertake the care of others, if she did not first learn to conduct herself properly; and could anything be more unbecoming than her present very childish and careless way of going on. She must remember that she was growing up now, that the home in which she was living was not her own, and that in two or three years she would have to begin life on her own account as a governess. She ought to make the most of the advantages she was then having, and learn to fit herself for her future duties, instead of trifling away

her time, and thinking of nothing but play and nonsense of all sorts. And Mrs. Tennent went on to speak of the gratitude, which if no consideration for her own interests could do so, ought to influence her, while she hinted at the same time, in no very ambiguous terms, that she much feared no such feeling had any existence in her, or she surely would have more thought for those who were showing her kindness, and would study to please them better.

Lisa listened to it all in silence, without attempting an excuse or reply of any kind; but the crimson colour that dyed her cheeks grew deeper and deeper as her aunt alluded to her dependent position, and the motives that ought to actuate her; and when Mrs. Tennent, having delivered her lecture, and said all that she thought proper, rose from her seat to leave the room, she stood there still, motionless and silent, as if she hardly knew where she was, or who had been speaking to her. It was not till the door closed, that she roused herself, and then raising her head, and looking round with a quick, hurried glance, as if to make sure that she was really alone, she threw herself down by the side of a low chair in front of the fire, and there hiding her face, sobbed wildly and bitterly. Whether her tears, however, were those of grief or anger, would have been hard to say; perhaps there was a mixture of both in them; but the latter most probably predominated, for her clenched hand, and the fierce, hard way in which she drew her

breath at times, seemed to speak more of passion than of sorrow.

But Lisa's stormy fits, violent as they generally were at the time, seldom lasted long; and when she had lain there for some minutes, and had cried until she appeared fairly to have exhausted herself, her sobs died away by degrees, and at last she sat up again, and brushing away her tears, looked as if she were rather ashamed of the tempest of passion to which she had given way. She had hardly begun, however, to collect her thoughts, and to resume more of her usual manner, when a step in the passage near caught her ear, and she started from the floor, half expecting to see her aunt come in once more, and dreading nothing so much as to be surprised by her in any exhibition of feeling.

But the person who entered the room was very different to Mrs. Tennent in every way. She was taller and darker, and younger—but not very young, for all that, for she could not have been far off thirty, and the grave and thoughtful look upon her face, when it was in repose, made her appear even older. It was a very pleasant face, however, even though it could lay claim to no beauty of any kind, and was considered by some people to be remarkably plain. But that was by people who did not know her well; by those who did, nothing was ever noticed but the unvarying expression of sweetness and gentleness that marked her features; and there was no one perhaps at the Priory who would

not have been surprised, had it ever been suggested to them, that Mary not only really was not pretty then, but could never by any possibility of a chance have been thought so. By her brothers and sisters she was perfectly idolised, and so entirely had she won their love and confidence, that it was a fact seldom remembered by the younger branches of the family that she was not their own sister. More especially was she loved by poor Lisa, to whom she had taken almost a mother's place ever since the day when, as an orphan—or rather, worse than orphan—she had first been brought there, and who clung to her with an affection that was all the more deep and absorbing, because there were so few others on whom she could bestow it. She sprang forward now, with a face that was radiant with pleasure, and from which every trace of sorrow was gone in a moment.

'Mary, dear Mary! Oh, how glad I am! But when did you come? and what was I doing that I did n't hear you? How long have you been here?' And she threw her arms round her cousin, and bestowed on her such an embrace that it was quite a wonder Mary did not come out of it half demolished. 'What an age it is since you went away. It seems like four months instead of not four weeks. I am so glad—so very glad—that you are come back!'

'So am I glad to be back,' said Mary, with a smile; 'it is very pleasant to be at home again. But what

are you doing here by yourself, Lisa dear? I thought you would have been downstairs with the others. Is anything the matter?' she asked, looking at the long wet hair, and the eyelashes still fringed with tears.

But Lisa only smiled. 'Something *was* the matter, but never mind; it will be all right now you are here again. Aunt Helen has been scolding me, and that made me cry, but I don't mind it now.' And then, seeing her cousin still looking at her rather anxiously, she added sorrowfully, 'the truth is, Mary, that I have been very bad—very bad indeed. I have just forgotten everything, and done all the worst things you can possibly imagine; and I really did n't mean to do them. I don't know how they happened, indeed; for I am sure when you went away, I made up my mind to be extra well-behaved, and go on even better than when you are here. And I did at first—I really think I did—but somehow things got wrong afterwards, and everything happened unfortunately. I am very sorry—I did n't mean to forget, you see, but I did; and so I have been all wrong.'

'Yes, I see,' said Mary, thoughtfully; 'it was a pity, Lisa.'

'It was,' said Lisa very earnestly, 'It was a *great* pity; for I am sure, if anybody ever meant to be steady, I did. And yet I have n't been. I have vexed everybody, and done no good at all. Madame Ricard is as angry with me as can be, and says she shall tell you

how careless I have been, and so does Mrs. Dalton. That was because I forgot to practise a new piece she had given me—and really I think it was rather hard of her, for I have never forgotten my music before. I laughed about it, though; so I suppose that was what made her angry. Anyhow, I know she means to tell you; and aunt Helen is very angry too—you will hear all sorts of things about me from her. And Mary, she says that I am ungrateful—but I am not that—oh, I am not that—indeed I am not!' And Lisa burst into tears again. 'You don't think it of me, do you? You don't think me so bad as that? Though I'm bad enough, I know, I'm not ungrateful. I never, never should be. You won't believe it, will you?'

'No, indeed I won't. My dearest little Lisa, don't cry in that way. No one who knew you would believe such a thing for one moment. But you must remember, that mamma does not know you so well as I do, and—well, it was unfortunate that you forgot so much—but don't make yourself unhappy about it now. I dare say it is not so bad as you fancy; and I think you must have misunderstood mamma. She never meant to say such a thing as that, I am sure.'

'Yes, she did—she did—she said it two or three times over—and it's not true—indeed it isn't. But if you don't believe it, Mary, I won't mind. You never could think it, though, I know—you are sure and certain that I could never be ungrateful to you, if I were to anybody

else. You know it would be quite impossible for me to leave off loving you, and feeling grateful to you, when you have been so kind to me, and have cared for me, and taught me, and made me happy ever since I came here. I should be a wretch if I didn't love you —and love you from the bottom of my heart too—a great deal more than anybody else in the whole wide world. I would do anything for you—anything and everything. At least,' and she stopped, 'I always thought I would, but—it's that makes me so sorry now, because you see I haven't remembered half the things you wanted me to do. I almost wish you could have stayed away a little longer, that I might have had another try.'

'Never mind,' said Mary, cheerfully; 'I shall be going away again some day, and you can try then. You will have another opportunity, I dare say, and you will take more care, I am sure. And now, if you are not very sorry that I am come back, perhaps you won't mind helping me dress for dinner, or I shall be late, I am afraid—it must be nearly half-past six.'

'Twenty minutes past,' said Lisa, glancing at the time-piece. 'Oh, that's plenty of time; I can dress you in ten minutes comfortably. If you will sit down here in front of the fire and warm yourself, I'll run and fetch your things. I know where they are, and I looked out your evening dress before tea, so that is all ready. And

I'll do your hair—I can always make that look nice, you know—though aunt Helen does say that I never do my own fit to be seen—but that's because I don't take so much trouble about it.' And Lisa, having her thoughts diverted from herself, began to take a cheerful view of life again, and danced off in search of her cousin's things almost in her usual spirits.

'And so Percy is really here?' she said, when she had returned, and was standing carefully arranging Mary's hair in the way she knew she liked best; 'he is really here, and he is better, isn't he?'

There was something like a sigh from Mary. 'Yes, I suppose so. They wouldn't have let him travel if he had not been; but—I don't know. I was too sanguine at first, I believe, and so I have been disappointed. I didn't think, when I went away, that it would be so bad—I wasn't at all prepared for what he would have to go through, and I don't believe he was either. He has suffered so very much, poor fellow!'

Her sigh was very audible this time, and Lisa's face fell. 'But he will get well here,' she said; 'he will get well here much faster than in London. You won't be unhappy about him, Mary, will you? He is sure to be much better soon, and it is a great deal pleasanter both for him and you to be at home again.'

'Yes, so it is; and he was very anxious to come. I only hope he has not come too soon—before he was fit for the journey, I mean. I had no idea till yesterday

morning that the surgeons would let him travel at all at present, but of course directly they said it would make no difference, we were only too glad to get away. I almost wish though, now, that we had stayed till he had got up his strength a little. I am afraid the journey and the excitement altogether will throw him back; and if we had waited a few days, perhaps he would have been able to bear them better. But he wished so much to come, that it was difficult to persuade him to be at all prudent.'

Lisa was silent. She knew nothing of illness herself, and had seen but little of it in others, and consequently was hardly able to enter into Mary's fears with regard to her brother. But the anxiety unconsciously betrayed in her cousin's tone infected her in some measure, and for a few moments she remained very thoughtful.

'He will have plenty of time to get well,' she said at length, as she was putting in the last hair-pin; 'he will be here quite till the summer, won't he? How very nice it will be for you, Mary, having him at home so long!' The latter part of this speech was decidedly magnanimous, for, as she had before asserted, Lisa had by no means any particular fancy for her cousin Percy, and, as far as she was concerned, would not have been at all sorry if he had still been doing duty in the trenches before Sebastopol. She was a little disappointed to find that her magnanimity was thrown away, and that her words did not produce all the effect that was in-

tended. Her cousin smiled, indeed, but it was more at the eager tone than anything else, and she sat for some minutes with her eyes fixed rather sadly upon the fire, forgetting apparently that there was any need for haste, till Lisa pointed to the hands of the clock, which were just upon the half-hour. She got up then, and began slowly to put on her dress.

'Yes, it will be very pleasant,' she said, after a pause; 'very pleasant indeed, when I can once see him getting up his strength, and looking more as he used to do; but I am afraid it will be a long time first. He is quite worn out now with pain, and looks so old and haggard, that it often makes my heart ache to see him. And sometimes I wonder, Lisa, whether they have told us right—whether he ever will be strong and well again, or—' she stopped suddenly, and Lisa looked at her, hardly comprehending what she meant, and startled at the unwonted signs of agitation in one usually so noted for her quiet self-command. She had no time, however, for remarks or questionings, for the dinner-bell rang at that moment, and Mary, recovering herself by a strong effort, finished the rest of her toilette in haste and left the room.

'Thank you, dear, for helping me,' she said as she was going away; 'and the sooner you can finish drying your hair and come down, the better. We shall not be very long at dinner to-day.'

The door closed upon her, and Lisa, left once more to

herself, sat down upon a low stool in front of the fire, and took up a book, as if she were going to read; but as she held the volume upside down, most probably she was not much the wiser for its contents. Her thoughts were running instead upon her cousin Percy, and almost involuntarily, while thinking of him, her eye rested on a certain picture, belonging to Mary, and which hung over the piano on the opposite side of the room. It was the likeness of a young officer in the dress of the engineers, and it was from that alone that Lisa had been able to form any idea of the cousin whose acquaintance she was about to make, and whom, until now, she had never seen. He had been absent from England when she first came to live at the Priory, and the only time that he had ever been at home since, she had happened to be staying with some friends in London; and as he had been ordered abroad suddenly, soon after the breaking out of the Crimean war, they had never met. She knew nothing of him, consequently, but what she had heard from Mary and her other cousins, and the sort of acquaintance she had made with him from having been in the habit of contemplating that likeness regularly every morning for several years, while going through her major and minor scales, and other tedious exercises which she knew by heart so thoroughly that she had no need to give her thoughts to them. Beyond the fact, however, of having looked at it as she would have looked at anything else hanging there which could

give her food for speculation during a wearisome occupation, she had never regarded it with much interest, until she found that she was likely to know something of the original. Then she had studied it with great curiosity, not only during her practising hours, but at other times in the day also; and the opinion she had arrived at was by no means favourable for her cousin. She did not like him. He was plain—very plain—to begin with—and she never had liked such very plain people, they were always disagreeable—she had found it so over and over again—and she was quite sure that he would be the same. She could see it in his face, indeed; that deep-set eye and contracted brow were not at all prepossessing, and there was something very hard and determined about the expression of his mouth, and in the firm purpose of those thin compressed lips, which gave her the idea both that his temper was not to be trusted, and that he would be a dangerous person to offend. If there had not been a certain likeness to Mary in his face, she would have disliked him extremely; as it was, she did not exactly do that, but she was quite sure that she did not care to know him, and it was with something almost like dread that she looked forward to making his acquaintance. She wished he would have stayed away a little longer—that he had not been obliged, indeed, to come home at all while she was there—and in her dislike to going into the drawing-room, where she knew she must meet him, she sat lingering over the

comfortable fire upstairs far longer than was necessary, until a peremptory message from her aunt summoned her at length, and she was obliged to go down, with the pleasant reflection, as she did so, that she was certain to receive a reprimand for not having made her appearance sooner.

CHAPTER III.

LE BALAFRÉ.

IT was a popular tradition at the Priory that Lisa did not know how to walk, and whether this were true or not, certain it is that it was an art which she practised very little. She ran, danced, jumped, and skipped, but a sober walk was a thing in which she seldom indulged, and then only in cases of absolute necessity, when she had no choice in the matter. Upon receiving her aunt's message now, she twisted up her hair in a great hurry, and went flying off downstairs in her usual fashion, running from the top to the bottom at full speed, and clearing the four or five lower steps at a jump—a not very safe proceeding, for the hall and stairs were both highly polished, and a slip on her part might have entailed a broken limb or a sprained ankle. But she had always been accustomed to come down in this way, and did it as a matter of course, without ever giving a thought to possible consequences; and she was very much surprised now, as she was stooping to look for a thimble which she had dropped in her haste, to hear some one close beside her say,—

'Rather dangerous work that, Susan. I hope it is not your usual way of coming downstairs.'

'Susan! I'm not Susan!' she exclaimed, raising her head in some astonishment, and wondering for the moment who could have made such a mistake. A single glance showed her that it was a stranger—her cousin Percy, of course, as she remembered directly afterwards—and recalling her late meditations with regard to him, and the dislike with which she had been looking forward to making his acquaintance, she got up hastily, and in no little confusion. He was standing at the dining-room door, which was close to the foot of the staircase, and from which he had been just coming out, when her sudden appearance arrested him, and as their eyes met now, he seemed almost as much surprised as she had been on first hearing his voice.

'I beg your pardon,' he said, after a moment's pause, during which she was quite uncertain whether to run away or to stay where she was; 'I beg your pardon: I thought it was Susan coming down. You have not hurt yourself, I hope.'

Perhaps he was not accustomed to seeing young ladies of sixteen flying about in such an off-hand sort of fashion, and did not realise the idea that she had taken the five steps at a jump of her own free will. Some such doubt, at any rate, was implied in his words; and although Lisa was quite innocent of all consciousness of having compromised the dignity of her age, she

felt that this was not exactly the way in which she would have liked to be introduced to this very formidable cousin, and her colour rose a little.

'No, thank you, I am not hurt,' she said hastily; 'I was only looking for something I had dropped. It was my thimble—but I have found it now.'

She produced it as if in demonstration of the fact, and was turning away, when he stopped her.

'As there is no one else to do it, I think we must introduce ourselves. We are cousins, are we not? You are——'

He paused, seemingly not quite sure yet of her identity—as if he still had his doubts whether the very young-looking girl before him, with so much of the child about her, could possibly be the cousin whom he had perhaps pictured to himself. But he was not left long in uncertainty, for she looked up in some surprise at his hesitation.

'Yes, you are quite right. I am Lisa—Lisa Kennedy. And you are my cousin Percy,' she was about to have added, but the name sounded too familiar just then, and she corrected herself. 'And you are Captain Tennent, of course. I knew you directly I saw you, and I thought you knew me.' It was said so simply that it would have provoked a smile from most people, but there was not even the shadow of one upon his face.

'I was not sure,' he said, gravely; 'but as we know each other now, I suppose we may shake hands?'

'I suppose we may,' Lisa said, rather shyly, taking the hand he held out. He was so very different to any one else at the Priory, and was so very much taller and older-looking than anything she had ever imagined, that she was wofully afraid of him; and as they walked across the hall together towards the drawing-room, she felt such a tiny, insignificant creature by his side, that her trepidation increased tenfold. She would have liked to make a rush, and gain the door of the room without him, but that would have seemed unkind, for she noticed that he walked with difficulty, and was obliged to use a stick; and to run away and leave him under such circumstances was impossible. So, with some trouble, she restrained her pace to his; but the transit across the hall appeared a perfect journey to her, and she was infinitely relieved when the drawing-room was reached at last, and he held the door open for her to pass.

'Thank you,' and without venturing to look at him again, she slipped into the room, feeling very happy to be sheltered amongst numbers once more, and thinking even a scolding from her aunt preferable to being alone with such a very tall, grave-looking person. But Mrs. Tennent happened to be busy writing a note, for which a servant was waiting, and contented herself with 'You are very late to-night, Lisa. What has kept you so long?' as her niece passed her; and Lisa, glad to escape so easily, murmured an excuse of some sort,

and then stole away as far out of sight as possible; and finding an empty chair by Arthur's side at a distant table, sat down there with her work. She would have liked to join Mary, who was sitting near the fire on the other side of the room, but Percy had taken possession of a sofa in the same neighbourhood, and she thought she would rather be away from him. She felt more at her ease where she was, and was not sorry either to find herself in a position where she could make her observations without fear of notice on his part. She had scarcely seen him in the hall; the glance she had taken there at his face had not told her much, and she was anxious to see whether he at all resembled the picture which she had been studying so long, and which had given her so unfavourable an impression of him. A very short inspection now was sufficient to assure her of the truth of the general likeness, for the features were undoubtedly the same; but years of service, and much illness and hardship, had not tended to soften or improve a face which, even with youth and freshness to recommend it, had never prepossessed her in its favour; and if she had thought the Percy Tennent with whom she was familiar most decidedly plain-looking, the original by no means disabused her of that idea. Sunburnt, and worn, and thin, and without even the advantage of a pleasing smile or expression to redeem his features from their natural harshness, there was little in him to attract—much to repel; and when, after long

and close observation, she finally settled down into her first conviction that he was not only plainer than anybody she had ever seen, but that she was sure he was as harsh and as unpleasing as he looked, she was but sharing a very general opinion. There were some, perhaps, who thought differently, but certainly they were not people who met him casually, or knew but little of him; and Lisa, like many others, most commonly went by first impressions, and made up her mind accordingly that she never could and never would like him; nor did it, in her opinion, make much difference that she was seeing him then under most disadvantageous circumstances; for he was tired out with his journey, and evidently had no power or inclination to exert himself in any way. He lay back in a corner of the sofa on which he had established himself, and took no part in what was going on around him; and although he had a paper in his hand, it seemed to serve him more as an excuse for not speaking, than anything else, for he did not appear to read much of it. Pain and weariness were plainly written in every line of his face, and in his air of listless, settled indifference; but though Lisa was sorry for him, and more sorry still for Mary, of whose anxieties she could now understand something, she did not feel at all inclined to reverse her unfavourable opinion, and as she sat watching him very earnestly, her countenance betrayed in no small degree what was passing in her mind. A low, smothered laugh from

Arthur interrupted her meditations at last, and made her look round.

'Well, Lisa, what's the result of your investigations? You've studied him long enough, in all conscience, and must know him by heart now. What do you think of him? Is he handsome—the Adonis you want for your hero?'

'Handsome! He's ugly—positively ugly!' Lisa exclaimed, in a tone of great disgust. 'What a pity it is! Who would think he was Mary's brother? And you never told me that he was so very bad-looking, Arthur. You never told me that I was going to see anybody so really and truly ugly.'

'Of course not. How could I tell you would think him so? People have different tastes, you know; and for anything I knew, you might have admired him very much.'

'I am sure you never thought anything of the sort!' exclaimed Lisa indignantly. 'Why, he's as ugly as sin, and looks as disagreeable too. What are you laughing for, Arthur? I hate ugly people—I always did—and I am quite sure that I shall hate him. And he really is ugly—there can be no doubt about it. The only thing that can be said for him is, that he looks like a gentleman; but that can't prevent his being very, *very* plain. He has black hair, too, and black eyebrows, which I particularly detest. And what is that scar on his forehead? Is that a Crimean decoration?'

'Crimean? no, of course not; it was there the last time he was here. I don't know how he got it. It's an honourable one, I've no doubt.'

'Very likely; but it don't improve him for all that—I shall call him Le Balafré—it will be a good name for him, won't it? Is that the reason, too, why he wears his hair so low—to try and hide it? Well, he certainly does contrive to make himself frightful. And I think he must be blind, or very nearly so, by the way he shuts his eyes when he looks at things; and I saw him put up his glass just now when he wanted to see something Mary was showing him. Altogether, I don't like him, Arthur—I don't like his looks at all.'

'Don't you? That's a pity, because I am afraid he can't alter them—not even to oblige you. If he could, I dare say he would, with a great deal of pleasure; but as he can't, you must take him as he is. And allow me to remark, Miss Lisa, that you ought not to be so unreasonable as to dislike people for what they can't help. I thought you had more sense than to go by looks only.'

'That's right,' said Lisa, with a laugh; 'I always like to have one of your moral reflections, Arthur. I begin to fancy then what sort of sermons you will preach some day, and I am very anxious to hear them.'

'Are you? Well, it's a pleasure that I've no doubt you'll have. I believe I'm in for that kind of thing,' in a resigned tone. 'And I'll tell you what, when I'm

hard up for a subject, I'll take our present one to discourse upon. There's lots to be said about it, and it would make a first-rate sermon with proper handling. Never judge by appearances. I declare I'll make a note of it, and when it's preached you shall be one of the congregation, and remember that it's meant especially for your edification.'

'Very well,' said Lisa, looking delighted. 'But it must be preached in this church, or I'm afraid I shall run a chance of not hearing it, and I wouldn't miss for a good deal.' And then changing her tone: 'But you don't understand what I mean about people being ugly, and my not liking them for it. You say they can't help it and that it is not their fault, but I am sure it is; for it isn't bad features only that make a person plain. It is expression; and everyone can help that, for everyone can give themselves a pleasant expression if they like; and if they don't, it must be because they've nothing pleasant in them; and that certainly is their fault. And therefore I needn't like them, don't you see?'

'Yes, I see, most sapient philosopher. And I see, too, that according to you, everyone, however he is formed by nature, is responsible for his own good or bad looks; and, as these good or bad looks depend upon expression, they depend of course upon the mood in which each unfortunate individual finds himself at any particular time. So that a man who goes to bed very amiable

and handsome, may get up in the morning, out of temper or out of spirits, and very ugly—or *vice versâ*. And then, don't you see what you come to? For if such transformations take place in other men, why not in Le Balafré himself? Perhaps he may make his appearance to-morrow quite a good-looking fellow, and, in support of your own theory, you will be obliged to like him on the spot. And there's no reason, according to you, why he should not turn out as handsome as anybody, for he's not by any means the Caliban you seem to take him for—quite the contrary, I believe. Barring a little pride and a little hot blood no one can find much fault with him.'

'Proud and hot-tempered!' exclaimed Lisa, triumphantly; 'I knew it, I was quite sure of it. Those very thin lips and that long upper one, are always a sign of bad temper. I have heard people say so, and I have often noticed it. And his way of carrying himself shows that he is proud. Anyone can see that in a minute.'

'Military drill!' said Arthur, with a laugh. 'Is that what you go by? Well, you are prejudiced, if you can't let a man walk as he likes without setting him down as proud. But you'll change your mind some day. Now what do you bet, that when I come home in June, I don't find you and Le Balafré fast friends, and you swearing that there "never was nobody" like him in the whole wide world? Come, let's have a wager

What shall it be? Half a dozen pair of white gloves or——?'

'Or nothing. I wouldn't take it. How fond you are of your bets, Arthur. It is not at all proper for a clergyman that is to be; and this is such a ridiculous one too. It is just simply impossible that I should ever think differently of him, unless, indeed, it is to dislike him a little more. So I won't take advantage of you this time; I'll be generous, and spare your pocket, for I'm sure you've no money to throw away on white gloves, or anything else.'

'Never mind, that's my look-out, not yours. You take the bet, and I'll risk the gloves. Moreover, so sure and certain do I feel of not having to pay them, that if you like I'll make it a dozen instead of half. What do you say to that?'

'Lisa,' said Mrs. Tennent, from the other end of the room, 'I don't think that work of yours is getting on very fast; and I hope you don't mean to be as idle again to-night, as you have been the last three evenings. Pray don't sit there looking at your needle and never putting in a stitch. I daresay your conversation is very interesting, but if you can't work as well as talk, you had better change your seat. I can't bear to see such dawdling over everything.'

Lisa's head went down at this speech, and her needle began to fly in and out with astonishing rapidity; while Arthur shrugged his shoulders privately, and Susan, who

had been an attentive, though unnoticed, listener to what was passing, remarked in a very audible voice:—

'They were talking about betting. Arthur wants Lisa to have a wager about Percy, because she says—'

'Susan, hold your tongue,' exclaimed Arthur in such a peremptory tone, that Susan looked scared. 'What does it matter to you what we were talking about? you were not asked to listen. Little pitchers have no business with long ears, and if they've the misfortune to have them, they've no right to have long tongues too. Don't you know that?'

'No, I don't. I'm not a pitcher at all, and I don't know why you call me one,' said Susan, rather sulkily.

Arthur looked very solemn. 'Then, my dear child, you display a vast amount of ignorance; for which, considering the education you are receiving, I was not prepared. Pray listen attentively, therefore, while I try to enlighten you on the subject. You are called a pitcher, because a pitcher is a vessel that is meant to hold something, and to hold it safely too, and not let it come tumbling out when it's not wanted. And for that same reason you are a vessel, alias a pitcher; because you are meant to hold something; not what a literal pitcher holds, but other things a great deal more valuable; clever thoughts and ideas of all sorts and lots of knowledge; and you are to keep them all safe till they can be of some use to somebody, and not let them come dripping out when no one asks for them; other-

wise you will be of no use in the world, and will only make yourself disagreeable. Nobody likes a pitcher with a hole in it, and nobody likes a small child who can't keep what she hears. Now do you understand?'

'Yes,' was the answer, in rather a mystified tone. 'Is it all true, though?'

'True! Of course it is. And now, off with you, for I want to read.' And throwing himself back in his chair, and stretching out his legs at full length, he took up a book, while Susan walked away, looking considerably bewildered, and Lisa went off into a very merry, though subdued, laugh over her work—work which in spite of her aunt's admonition did not seem to advance very fast, and Mrs. Tennent, after watching her again for some minutes, once more raised her voice in displeasure.

'Really, Lisa, I must beg that you will be more industrious. You are doing nothing now, absolutely nothing; and you know very well that I expect those collars stitched this week. Lane tells me that you have lost all your others, and have hardly one to wear. Pray don't try my patience any longer by your idleness.'

'Lisa seems to me to possess the happy knack of getting rid of all her property in a most marvellous manner,' remarked Arthur, who, notwithstanding his injunction to Susan to take herself off that she might not interrupt his studies, did not appear to be much engrossed with his book. 'How do you manage, Lisa?

Do you bestow it all on the beggars in the streets, as you did that boa of yours? Mary, you heard that story, of course.'

'Oh, Arthur, be quiet!' Lisa exclaimed in rising wrath; but Arthur was not to be so easily silenced.

'Hands off,' he said, coolly, backing his chair a little; 'you needn't stick your needles into me because I want Mary to hear of one of your little eccentricities. Now, Mary, listen. You must know, that one day just after you went, Miss Lisa was returning from Copelands, as usual about half a mile in advance of the others, when she comes upon a woman sitting by the roadside in a most deplorable state; shoeless, stockingless, and, not quite clothesless, but, cloakless at any rate, and altogether such a wretched-looking object, that the heart of this soft young lady was touched at once. I can't give particulars of the scene, not having been present, though I have no doubt it was affecting: but the upshot of it all was that Mistress Lisa, who I suppose had just been perusing the story of St. Martin—'

'I hadn't; I don't know anything about St. Martin,' interposed Lisa, who was looking very crimson. 'I wish you would be quiet, Arthur,' she exclaimed, in great distress.

'Seizes the first thing that presents itself, which happens to be a very pretty new boa, only given her the week before, and makes it over to the beggar on the [redacted] I wonder she didn't divest herself of her own

shoes and stockings, or dress, or some other article of attire, equally necessary to the object in question; but I suppose she thought it would hardly do to walk home minus those needfuls of her toilette; or perhaps she considered that the boa would do to invest in gin as well as anything else.'

'In gin!' Lisa's look was half horror, half indignation.

'Yes, gin; it went in that of course: you don't think she would sit under the hedge contemplating such a pretty little affair, or that she could put it on her feet to keep them warm. No, she went to the gin shop, and had a carouse, you may be sure.'

'She hadn't, I don't believe it,' Lisa exclaimed, the tears starting to her eyes. 'How can you say such wicked things, Arthur? she could buy bread and shoes with it; and she did, I know she did.'

'You know nothing of the sort, Lisa,' said Mrs. Tennent. 'You had never seen the woman before and you have never seen her since; and the probabilities are, that it went exactly as Arthur says. Anyhow you will please to remember what I told you then, that your clothes are not given you for such purposes. What we provide is meant for you to wear, and not to throw away just as the fancy takes you. I wonder how you could dream of doing such a thing.'

'I thought it was my own and that I could do what I liked with it,' Lisa said, in a low voice.

'You were mistaken, then,' said Mrs. Tennent in great displeasure. 'And you will oblige me for the future by not being so free with other people's property. Your uncle's things are not to be given away without his leave, and you have nothing but what he gives you, as you know well enough.'

Lisa was silent, but Mary interposed rather hastily.

'But my dear Lisa, what have you been wearing all this cold weather if you have not had that boa? You don't mean to say that you have been going out with nothing round your neck in all these frosts?'

'Of course she has,' rejoined Mrs. Tennent; 'she had nothing else, and it was not likely that I should get her another, because she chose to dispose of that. No, she went without; and she will have to go without now for the remainder of the winter. I have no money to throw away if she has, and she must take the consequences of her imprudence. She caught a bad cold that afternoon as might have been expected, and was in bed for some days, but it was her own fault and no one could pity her. It served her right for being so foolish.'

'I am not very cold now; I don't mind it,' Lisa said in answer to Mary's anxious look, while Susan remarked—

'Lisa is so odd, she does such funny things. This morning she knelt down in the middle of the street to help a man look for a sixpence he had dropped; and

you should have seen all the people staring at her as they went by. They couldn't make out what she was doing.'

Mrs. Tennent looked up. 'You surely didn't do such a thing as that, Lisa?' in a tone of reproach.

'He was a very old man; he couldn't stoop to find it himself, and he was very poor; he hadn't another, he said.'

Lisa's voice was scarcely audible, and as she did not raise her eyes to her aunt's face, she did not see the look which accompanied the comment, 'and of course you were obliged to go down on your knees in the mud to look for it: I wonder, child, what you will do next.' She did see something else, however, a few moments afterwards; for, when stealing a glance across the room towards the place where Mary sat, she encountered a most fixed earnest gaze from her cousin Percy, who had evidently been watching her intently for some time. He dropped his glass and took up his paper again as their eyes met, but not before Lisa was aware of the close scrutiny to which she had been subjected. It was a scrutiny which at once threw her into herself, and of which it was quite clear she did not approve. She resented it, too, in her own fashion, for, with a pout on her lip, she pushed her chair far back out of sight, and relapsed into total silence. For the remainder of the evening no one again heard the sound of her voice.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT LISA THINKS OF HER COUSIN.

'WELL, good bye, Scaramouch,' said Arthur as he was standing in the hall on the following day, waiting for his uncle, who was going to drive him to the station, 'good bye, Scaramouch: and so you won't take my wager after all. Do you know though, what I've serious thoughts of doing? and that is of asking Le Balafré to take you in hand a little. Perhaps he may be able to effect a slight but necessary reformation in one or two particulars, and I'm sure we should all feel duly grateful to him for so doing. What do you say? You would have no objection, I suppose, to follow any suggestions he might make?'

Lisa, a deplorable figure as usual from ink, a torn dress, and untidy hair, stopped short in the middle of a dance which she was performing round the table with Georgie, and after looking at him for a moment, broke into a little scornful laugh.

'I should like to see him interfering with me! Don't you put him up to that, Arthur, or I'll never speak to you again, or to him either. And there's no need I

should quarrel with him, though I don't like him; but I shall most certainly if he tries anything of that sort. So just let us alone, if you please, and don't make me angry for nothing.'

'Very well, my fair cousin,' said Arthur, looking at her raised colour and sparkling eyes with a smile. 'I leave you to your own devices then, hoping that some day you will see the error of your ways and mend them. And your dress, too,' he added, pointing to the said article, 'there won't be much of it left soon if you don't mind. Good bye.'

'Good bye!' exclaimed Lisa, springing forward, her momentary anger having vanished. 'Oh, Arthur, I'm so sorry you are going! We've had such fun this Christmas, and it will be so stupid when you are away! I wish—I wish somebody else that I know were going, and you staying! Oh, dear, it will be so dull; so horrid without you. Can't you come at Easter and not wait till June? Do say that you will, and then I shall have something to look forward to.'

Arthur gave a whistle. 'I don't see how I can. It's such a long journey for such a short time. You, in your consideration for my pocket, ought to know that, for if you remember, I've nothing to spare for white gloves or anything else. No, I don't think I shall leave Cambridge at all. I mean to read hard and get myself thoroughly stupefied; and when summer comes, I shall run down here to be knocked into life again.

We'll have lots more fun then, and Nelly will join us I've no doubt, as she'll be safe from the snowballing.'

Elinor, however, who was passing through the hall at that moment, and to whom this was addressed, seemed rather to demur to the proposal.

'Perhaps so—I don't know. I have not so much time now for that kind of thing as Lisa has, and I don't care for it very much either. Oh, dear, how cold it is! How long is that door going to be open, Fred? Can't you shut it till they are ready? It's enough to freeze anyone to have such gusts of cold wind coming in!'

'It's no use,' shouted Fred, 'here's papa!' And Dr. Tennent, who had just been dismissing a patient, making his appearance from his consulting-room, a general shaking of hands and good-byes followed; and off went Arthur.

'Till June! What an immense time!' sighed Lisa to herself as she went up stairs, feeling very dull; and having deposited little George in the nursery, she walked off to Mary's room to get some consolation. It was a place where she was sure to find it in all her troubles, and kneeling down now by the fire, she poured out her lamentations to Mary, who had been very busy writing when she came in, but who put away her letters when she found her cousin wanted her attention, and listened very sympathisingly to all she had to tell of the pleasures of the last few weeks and

how sorry she was that they were over. They had a long talk together, which had the usual effect of restoring Lisa to her accustomed spirits, though she could not help winding up with another sigh at Arthur's departure, and the remark that 'it was a pity, a very great pity, that he was obliged to go.'

'So it is,' said Mary, good-naturedly; 'he is very pleasant, and I like him very much. But after all, Lisa, one can't spend one's whole life in amusement. And he will have to work hard enough by and by, so that it's only right he should be getting ready for it now; and he couldn't do that if he stayed here. Besides, I should think you wouldn't be sorry yourself to begin again regularly: you would be tired in time of nothing but fun and pleasure.'

'I don't know that,' said Lisa, rather doubtfully, 'I never have been tired of it yet, and I don't fancy I ever should be. I suppose, though, Mary,' she added with a smile after some meditation, 'I suppose that means that you would like to see me set to work? You think I have been idle quite long enough?'

Mary smiled too. 'Something of the sort certainly. And from a good many signs in the room I should say there was a great deal to be done. Your German books look as if they had not been opened since I went away, to judge from the quantity of dust upon them; and I came across a French exercise in that drawer just now, which was hardly begun. To-morrow is Madame

Ricard's day, you know, and I'm afraid you are not ready for her.'

'No, that I'm sure I'm not. The old crosspatch! Don't scold, Mary dear, she really is cross, and the last time she was here she was particularly so. She gave me such quantities to learn and write, that I was in despair, so I just shut the books up and stuffed them away anywhere, and I've never looked at them since. But I will now. I'll begin at once and I'll work very hard, and that will make the days go faster. I can always work better when you are here, because you keep me up to it.' And Lisa, whose industrious moods generally came by fits and starts, jumped up from her kneeling posture and was making a rush to the drawer in question when Mary stopped her.

'I think, dear, before you begin it would be quite as well if you were to go and look at yourself in the glass. You surely can have no idea what a figure you are just now. I never remember seeing you so untidy, and if it is the holidays which have brought you to such a state, I must say I think it's no bad thing they are over.'

She spoke so very gravely that Lisa looked rather ashamed. 'Am I so very untidy?' she said, in some confusion. 'I didn't know it. Arthur said something, too; but then he was always teasing me about my dress, so I didn't think much of it. Am I really very bad?'

'Yes, very bad—very untidy indeed. And really,

dear Lisa, that is one thing in which you have not improved at all lately. You were much better at one time, but you have gone off again sadly. Even Percy noticed this morning how untidy you were, and asked me if you always went about in that way. He dislikes exceedingly to see people careless and slovenly in their dress; and I was rather sorry that you, as my eldest pupil, should have taken so little trouble to look neat.'

Lisa coloured, and for some minutes stood still where she was, twisting a piece of thread in her fingers without making any answer. But she looked up presently.

'Very well, Mary, I'll go if you like, and try what I can do; but—' in a very doleful voice, 'I really don't see that it is of much use, for I *cannot* keep myself tidy, do what I will. My things are very unfortunate; they are like nobody else's, and that's the truth. They *will* tear and they *will* come to pieces; and all my hooks and eyes and buttons come off, and all my hair-pins tumble out; and I lose everything and never find anything again, so that how I am to be neat I can't tell; I suppose it's my fault—everybody says so, but I'm sure I don't know how to be different. I'm always trying, but I never seem to get any better. Indeed you say now that I am worse than ever, and that is rather disheartening, because I had been—well no, I can't say that exactly, for I don't think I've thought much about it lately. Indeed I know I haven't, so perhaps that is the reason why you notice I am not improved. But

I'll begin again now: perhaps I shan't forget so often now you are here to remind me. At any rate I'll try, to please you.' And as if impelled by fresh energy, she gave two or three hops towards the door as she spoke, but paused before she reached it.

'Mary, there's just one thing I should like to say if you don't mind.'

'Well, dear?' And Mary looked up from the writing she was beginning again.

'I hope you won't care very much—I mean I hope you won't be disappointed or vexed if—if I don't particularly like Percy. As he is your brother, I ought to like him: I thought I should, but—'

'But you don't. I am not so unreasonable though, Lisa, as to expect you to like him before you know him. You have had no time yet to make his acquaintance.'

'Yes, but when I do know him, I mean,' persisted Lisa. 'Will you be very much vexed then if I don't like him?'

'Not in the least,' said Mary, with a smile; 'you are quite at liberty to like him or not just as you please, without any fear of vexing me. I suppose, though, as you say that, you think at present there is no chance of your doing so.'

[redacted] much,' said Lisa, balancing herself on one foot, [redacted]ften did, when she was meditating. 'He's not [redacted], Mary,' she added after a pause.

'No, not at all. At least not in most things. I believe he is in a few.'

'In face I meant,' said Lisa; 'he's not half so nice-looking as you are. In fact, Mary, I hope you don't mind my saying it, but I don't think him good-looking at all.'

Mary laughed. 'No more do I. I am quite of your opinion, Lisa. Though he is my own brother and I love him very dearly, I have never thought him good-looking; but I can't say that I care much about that. I know him so well and love him so much, that I only think of what he is himself, and not what his looks are. If he were twice as plain as he is, he would do well enough for me. It would make no difference in my love for him.'

Lisa made no answer to this, her own private opinion being that no one could possibly be plainer than Percy was already—as for being twice as plain, that was quite out of the question; but of course she did not say so, and after balancing herself very dexterously on her one foot for a few moments longer, she went away, remarking as she left the room:

'Well, I'm very glad, Mary, that you won't feel hurt if I don't like him. I was afraid you would, and I should have been so sorry to vex you. I am very sorry, too, that you were ashamed of me this morning. I'll go now and make myself tidy, and see if I can't keep so, to please you.'

Poor Lisa! her good intentions were never-ending, and they were no less sincere at the time they were made than they were numerous; but unfortunately they seldom outlived the occasion which called them forth, and every better resolve was sure to be forgotten as soon as she became engrossed in any fresh pursuit or had her attention diverted to any passing amusement. Affectionate and full of generous impulse, she was yet careless and wilful to a degree; and her wayward thoughtlessness was often no little source of trouble to Mary, who, from having had the charge of her for many years, had come to look upon her almost as her own child, and could hardly have loved her better had she really been so.

It was a love which Lisa on her side fully returned, and a word or look from her cousin was always sufficient at any time to influence her even in her most unreasonable moods. She would not for worlds have done a thing knowingly to vex her, and was never more grieved, than when she found she had in any way given her cause for displeasure; but although deeply penitent whenever this happened, and firmly resolved that nothing of the sort should ever occur again, somehow it did occur, and very frequently too. As Mrs. Tennent said, she could not always have Mary to look after her, and when left to herself she was very apt to run wild and forget every good resolution made in her more sober moments. Her aunt excepted, however, there

was hardly anyone with whom she was not a favourite, both at home and elsewhere, and yet complaints against her were universal. There was little, indeed, that went wrong at the Priory, which, if not either distinctly traced back to her, was not at any rate laid to her charge as being the most likely person to be answerable for it. And it is to be feared that most of these accusations were not without good foundation, for she meddled with everybody's affairs, and there was not a corner or cupboard in the house into which she was not continually penetrating for some reason or other. She made her way into the attics, where she carried on games at hide-and-seek with Susan and Constance, and nearly distracted the maids by the confusion she left behind her—she descended to the kitchens, where she tormented the cook unceasingly by insisting on helping in the manufacture of puddings and tarts—an accomplishment for which she had a decided talent, but which cook, not caring to be interfered with in that department, never encouraged. Driven off from this, therefore, she foraged in the store-closet for raisins and sugar, or paid visits to the dairy, where she not only drank milk and cream herself, but also indulged in the same luxuries a white cat which she chose to pet because everybody else hated it for its extreme ugliness. No place indeed was safe from her incursions, not even the back premises, where old Richard the gardener, groom, and general factotum, reigned supreme, but where, although cross enough to most people,

he never objected to see Miss Lisa when she chose to come and investigate his proceedings—assist to feed and groom the horse, wash the carriage and other such like occupations in which she delighted, and in which, under pretence of forwarding his work, she contrived materially to hinder it. It is true that he grumbled sometimes, and said that she was the plague of his life, for she lost everything she got hold of and did more mischief in half-an-hour than anybody else in a year; but he liked to see her there notwithstanding, and in spite of his complaints always let her do as she pleased, and her visits in consequence were neither few nor far between.

There were none, indeed, who were not glad to see her; and though everybody scolded, everybody liked her too, for it was impossible to be long angry with one who was always so penitent when she had offended, and who took all scolding and fault-finding so humbly and sweet-temperedly. Mary certainly was never disposed to be angry, though it must be confessed her patience was often sorely tried, and perhaps never more so than for some time after her return home now; for the freedom and unrestraint of a few weeks had thoroughly unsettled her excitable and impulsive little cousin, and it seemed, at first, simply impossible to expect anything like a return to the habits, which had only been in some measure and with great difficulty instilled into her before. Now she could not fix her thoughts steadily

upon anything, and in spite of all Mary's remonstrances and her own repeated promises and firm resolutions, she was so wild and so inattentive to all she had to do—so utterly idle and careless—that it was no wonder her aunt was often seriously displeased, and that she did not show her displeasure only in looks or manner. She spoke it out in words too, strongly and plainly; and although formerly Lisa had not perhaps cared half so much as she ought, for what was said to her at such times, it certainly was not the case now when her cousin Percy was often sitting by to hear it all. She did not like it at all then; hating nothing more indeed than to be found fault with, as she not unseldom was, before him; but even this had not the effect of rendering her more attentive and industrious, and thereby avoiding the lectures which she drew down upon herself. Its only result was the somewhat unreasonable one of increasing her prejudice against her cousin, and making her regard him as in some way answerable for what was so very unpleasant to her. She often was unreasonable, however; choosing to think and act without apparently having any cause for what she did, and it was so now. She had taken a dislike to Percy on account of his plain looks, and grave and silent manner, and she had made up her mind in consequence that he was disagreeable, and that she did not want to know him. She kept out of his way, therefore, as much as possible, never spoke to him if she could help it, and

steadily resisted all advances on his part to a mutual acquaintance; and at first she found this not at all difficult, for he was sometimes confined to his room for days together, and even when he joined the family, was unable to take part in what went on among them, or to exert himself in any way.

But by degrees as he began to recover his health and strength, and to fall more into the regular routine and habits of the household, it became impossible for her to avoid him as she had done; for not only at breakfast and luncheon, when she was sure of meeting him, but many other times in the day also, they were constantly thrown together; and although nothing but the commonest civilities passed between them at such times, and he made no attempt to force on her an acquaintance for which he could not help seeing she was disinclined, it was not easy for her long to remain so thoroughly indifferent to his presence as she had meant to be. Shy and unsociable she was still, and she did not like him one bit better than before, or ever mean to do so; but it was no want of interest after a time that made her keep aloof from him. She amused herself, indeed, in various ways at his expense, made all sorts of disparaging remarks upon him, laughed at and imitated his way of speaking, and of looking at things; and in allusion to his short-sightedness and want of good looks, bestowed on him numerous witty epithets, many of them more expressive than polite. But notwithstanding all this,

and her strong and foolish prejudice, which in no wise diminished, from some cause or other she could not help being attracted by him, and almost in spite of, and unknown to, herself, her feelings in some respects began to change towards him.

One reason for this might be that, as she was not long in discovering, he was a perfect gentleman, not in appearance only, but in every word and feeling, and she had an instinctive sense of confidence in any one who could lay claim to such a title, however little liking she might have for them on other accounts. Silent and reserved, also, as he was in general, she found out that he could talk sometimes, and talk well too; and having been accustomed to hear him give only very ordinary answers to very ordinary remarks and questions, perhaps she was never more surprised in her life, than when, one evening, she heard him conversing with his father and two or three other gentlemen who had been dining there. It was some scientific subject they were discussing, and it was evident that it was one which he had studied deeply and was well acquainted with in all its bearings; and he grew so eloquent while proving some disputed point with regard to it, and his countenance lighted up with so much animation, that Lisa forgot everything else as she listened; forgot that she thought him plain, that she did not wish to know, and meant to keep away from him; and she drew closer and closer to the place where he was standing, her eyes

riveted upon his face, and her absorbed and eager gaze betraying her intense interest in what he was saying. But he came to a pause at last; and as he did so, his eye happened to meet hers, and then the charm was broken. In great confusion, as if she had been caught doing something wrong, she turned away and walked off to the other end of the room; and for the rest of that evening and many days after, she was shyer and more constrained than ever in his presence, as if she were vexed with herself for having been beguiled, if only for a few minutes, into a more favourable impression of him.

CHAPTER V.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

'OH, Mary, such fun! We've been to Copelands this afternoon, and Mrs. Pye wants us to go to tea there to-morrow. Do you think Aunt Helen will let us? I hope she will. Mr. Pye has a new hunter, such a beauty! And one of the cows has a calf, and three of the hens are sitting, and there will be some chickens in a day or two, perhaps to-morrow; and the old drake——'

Lisa stopped short suddenly in the midst of her list of attractions to be found at Copelands farm, for she discovered that her cousin, into whose room she had rushed immediately on her return from a walk, was not alone as she had expected. Percy was with her, and Mrs. Tennent also; though the latter was on the point of leaving as her niece came flying in, and it was her look of surprise and displeasure which had brought the above speech to such an abrupt conclusion. Lisa indeed had certain vague notions that she was not exactly in a presentable state just then, and when she found who was there, would have been glad to make her escape again; but as she had been seen and this was impossible,

she thought it best to appear unconcerned, and stood where she was, playing with an immense bunch of primroses and violets that she had in her hand. Anything more exquisitely lovely than she looked at that moment it would have been difficult to imagine. The high March wind had raised her colour and blown her light-brown wavy hair about her face, and her dark eyes were sparkling half with pleasure, half with mischief and something of apprehension, as she raised a furtive glance to her aunt to discover what was coming, and whether she was to have the scolding which of course she anticipated—and not without reason, for Mrs. Tennent's face clouded visibly.

'I wish, Lisa, you would learn to come into a room more quietly—more like a lady, instead of rushing in, in that wild way, leaving all the doors open behind you. Pray shut that one directly, and then tell me what you have been doing to make yourself such a figure. I am perfectly ashamed of you. Have you been into the pond, child, or what have you done to get so dreadfully wet, and spoil all your clothes in that way?' She looked angrily at the half-dried mud and green duck-weed clinging to her niece's skirts and boots, and Lisa herself appeared somewhat dismayed as she took in, perhaps for the first time, the whole extent of the damage done to her dress. She walked to the door, however, and closed it, and then came back again, pulling on her hat which the wind had blown off, and pushing back her hair.

'I'm very sorry, Aunt Helen, but I couldn't help it,' she began.

'Of course not, you never can help anything,' rejoined Mrs. Tennent angrily. 'But that is such a very idle excuse; I am perfectly tired of hearing it. And if you can't help it, I should like to know who can. You seem to think, Lisa,' that your uncle and I have nothing in the world to do with our money but to buy you clothes, whenever you choose to spoil them. But you are quite mistaken, and if you like to make your things shabby, you may wear them so; I shall not trouble myself about it. What were you doing, I should like to know, that you could not help making yourself that figure? Nothing that was proper for a young lady, I am sure.'

Lisa glanced at Percy, who however, as usual at the commencement of such scenes, had taken up a book, and might not have heard a word of what was passing, so engrossed did he seem with its contents. He would have left the room, perhaps, as he sometimes did, but that they were standing too near the door to allow him easy egress, so he could only look unconscious and keep his eyes fixed steadily on the page before him.

'It was the wind,' she said; 'I really couldn't help it. My hat was blown off, and I had to run across some fields after it. A man tried to catch it for me—he tried to spear it with his umbrella, but he let it go again, and he couldn't run so fast as I did; so when

it was blown into a ditch at last, I got there first: and I jumped down into a lot of water—I didn't know there was any there; it all looked green and dry, but it wasn't; it was very wet, and that was how I did all this. I was afraid of letting my hat fly off again, you know. I might never have got it at all if I had, for you've no idea what a chase I had. I thought at one time I should have to leave it behind me, and come home without anything on my head. It was great fun!' she added, with another sparkle in her eyes, and forgetting for the moment, the awe inspired by her aunt's presence.

'Indeed! I am sorry to hear it. I should not have thought carelessness could be fun at any time: and you must have been extremely careless, to let your hat go in that way. If it had been tied on, you would not have lost it at all ; and nody but yourself would ever have dreamed of jumping into a ditch, without looking to see if there were water in it or not. Who ever heard, indeed, of young ladies jumping into ditches at all? I am very much displeased with you, Lisa: but of course that is nothing to you. Let me say what I will, you never try to do better, so that it is quite useless for me to take any trouble about you. The best way in future, I think, will be to let you do just as you like, but you will be sorry a few years hence, that you have not tried to please us more. If you have any right feeling, that is; but really sometimes, I doubt whether you have, or

you would not give us the anxiety and annoyance that you do.'

And Mrs. Tennent, in a state of high displeasure, walked from the room, leaving Lisa in bewildered consternation, and almost blinded with the tears which the latter words had called forth.

'Is that true, Mary?' she said at last, raising her head and speaking with a sob. 'Is that really true? Have I no right feeling at all?' And she came to the back of her cousin's chair and flung her arms round her neck; 'I didn't know I had done anything so very bad; indeed I didn't; I never meant any harm. I wouldn't have done it if I had thought it was wrong. You are not angry with me as well as Aunt Helen, are you?' she said in an imploring tone: and then, as some sudden movement from Percy recalled her to a sense of his presence which, for the moment, she seemed to have forgotten, she loosed her hold of her cousin quickly, and stood up again, with deepening colour and embarrassed look. 'I brought these flowers for you, Mary,' she said, holding out the primroses, 'I got them for you in the woods; I thought you would like them.' And laying them down upon the table, she rushed away without looking round again, or waiting for an answer.

Mary took them up, and held them thoughtfully, almost sadly, for some minutes.

'Poor Lisa,' she said at last, with a sigh, 'I wish she

could learn to be a little more thoughtful, a little more womanly! What a child she is!'

'Child indeed!' muttered Percy to himself; and he threw down his book and walked to the window. 'But Mrs. Tennent is hard upon her,' he added, turning back to his seat after a few moments' pause. 'She is such a child after all that one can't expect much from her. What is the use of magnifying a little heedlessness into a great crime and making her miserable for nothing? One can't look for perfection in a girl of sixteen.'

'Or in anybody else, either,' said Mary, with a smile. 'But I don't think you know enough of Lisa to understand how very provoking such perpetual carelessness is—I can't wonder that mamma is so often vexed with her, for she is very trying sometimes; trying even to me, though of course, I can never feel angry with her as others do. I know all her good qualities, and love her too well for that; but I would give a good deal, too, to have her different in many things. I am afraid there must be something wrong in my management, or she surely would be improved by this time.' And Mary pondered a little, with rather a troubled expression upon her face, and then laid down her work. 'I had better go to her now at any rate,' she said, getting up; 'I am always sorry when mamma says those kind of things to her; they make her wretched, and I am afraid do very little good. She is crying by herself somewhere, I daresay, and she won't be happy again till I have seen her.'

And moved by the picture, which she had conjured up

to herself, Mary lost no time in hurrying off in search of 'her child,' and giving the comfort, which, better than anybody else, she knew how to administer. There were no traces of tears in Lisa's bright eyes the next time Percy saw her; she had forgotten apparently what, while it lasted, had been such an overwhelming trouble to her. Childlike, she had thrown off all thought of it, and she sang and danced with Georgie, in the back-drawing-room that evening, as she always did, and looked as if she had never known a care, or heard an angry word, in her life. She was paler than usual, certainly; but perhaps there was good reason for that, for sundry sneezing and shivering fits betokened very plainly a coming cold; and nobody would have wondered at this, had it been generally known, that she had sat on the brick floor of Mrs. Pye's wash-house for nearly an hour that afternoon in her wet things, helping to put peppercorns down the throats of several ducklings that had been just hatched, and for whose preservation and well-being this process was considered necessary. Of course she had never thought of the probable effects of sitting so long in a damp dress and soaked boots; and of course she forgot, when she came back, to say that she had done so; and as Mrs. Tennent was not in the habit of coddling her children or making much of small ailments, very little notice was taken of her present symptoms. She was sent to bed, indeed, rather earlier than usual, and told to ask Lane to give her something warm; but meeting her favourite, the white cat, in

one of the passages, as she was going upstairs, she stayed to have a game with it, and when she reached the nursery at last, forgot to give her message, sitting down with the nurse instead, to have some supper in the shape of bread and cheese, and going to her own room after all much later than usual.

She came down the next day with very heavy eyes, and evidently far from well; but as she talked and laughed, and rushed about the house all the morning, with undiminished spirits, no one paid much attention to her looks, more especially as Mary, who would have done so at any other time, was engaged for some hours and saw nothing of her; and Percy perhaps was the only person who perceived anything amiss, though he did not say much until the afternoon, when, to his great astonishment, she made her appearance in the drawing-room ready equipped for a walk, and come to ask her aunt's permission for them all to go to tea at Copelands.

Copelands was a small farm about two miles from Atherstone. It belonged to Dr. Tennent, and was let by him to a respectable man and his wife, with whom the younger members of the Priory household were on a most friendly footing. Mr. and Mrs. Pye had no children of their own, and were very fond of young people. They liked nothing better than to have constant visits from the doctor's family, to whom the farm offered numberless attractions, and who were always finding

pretexts to go there. The pleasures of playing in the barn and out-houses, visiting the stables, milking the cows and chasing unlucky fowls and pigs, were irresistible, nor did Lisa consider herself by any means too old for such amusements. On the contrary she appreciated them more than anybody, and always entered with such manifest enjoyment into everything that was going on, that she was a special favourite with the farmer and his wife, and indulged by them to an unlimited extent. Going to tea with Mrs. Pye when they sat in the sanded kitchen in very high-backed, hard, uncomfortable chairs, at a white deal table, and ate off pewter plates, but always with the best of cheer before them (for the good lady was very proud of her home-made bread, her cakes, cream, and butter) was to Lisa the most delightful of pleasures, and one which she would not have missed for a good deal. She had not a thought now for colds or coughs or anything else, and although there was a keen east wind blowing, and the sky was clouding over as if some heavy showers might be expected, she did not seem to think these any reasons for staying at home. Her only fear appeared to be lest her aunt should remember her carelessness of the day before, but Mrs. Tennent was deep in a new book, and gave the desired permission without even raising her eyes. In high glee Lisa was turning away, when Percy, who was leaving the room, but had paused to hear the decision, looked back in some surprise.

'You surely are not thinking of going out such a day as this, and with that bad cold upon you, Lisa. It would be the height of imprudence. You have no idea how damp and raw it is.'

Lisa looked excessively annoyed. 'Aunt Helen says I may go. It won't hurt me. Please don't keep me,' she exclaimed, in an agony of impatience, and trying to pass him as he stood with his hand upon the door. But it was too late for her to get away. Mrs. Tennent's attention had been caught, and she called her back just as she was making her escape.

'I forgot your cold, Lisa; Percy is right, it won't do for you to go. Susan and Constance may if they like, but you will be much better at home. I don't know why you asked me, indeed, for you must have known you had no business to go out at all.'

'Oh, Aunt Helen,' in an imploring tone. 'It won't hurt me, my cold is nothing. Do let me go,' she exclaimed, entreatingly.

'Certainly not,' said Mrs. Tennent, taking up her book again. 'Go and take off your bonnet at once, and don't let me hear another word about it.'

Lisa retired. When her aunt spoke in that way, she knew well enough that it was useless to say more, and she left the room in a grievous state of disappointment. In the hall she came upon Percy, and then her anger blazed forth.

'Thank you, Captain Tennent, for stopping my

pleasure,' she said, scornfully, as she passed him. 'I am much obliged to you for your interference.'

He turned round. 'But Lisa—'

Lisa, however, had no intention of listening to anything he had to say. With the angry colour in her cheek and a flash in her eye, she stamped her foot at him and went off like an arrow from a bow. He heard her fleet step up the stairs and along the passage for a moment, and then a distant door was flung to with great violence, and a dead silence followed. She had taken refuge in her own room, and there in a very stormy mood, she paced up and down for some time, until by degrees her wrathful feelings began to work themselves off, and then she walked to the window and looked out. A shower had come on since she had been shut in there, and the rain was now dripping heavily from the eaves of the house and among the leafless lime-trees close by. The sight of the dreary prospect, the darkened sky, the bare garden with its sodden turf and damp gravel walks, and the grey walls of the church looking greyer and gloomier than ever in the shrouding mist, might almost have reconciled her to missing her walk, but that she was not disposed just then to be reconciled to anything. She stood there and watched until the shower passed off, and a gleam of sunlight came out again upon the green lawn and sparkled on the glistening rain-drops that hung from the boughs above her window; and then she pictured to herself the sloping

meadows at Copelands, and the sunny dingles there, where the trees were budding fast, and where big clusters of primroses lay hidden among the moss and in the hollows of the old stumps; and she longed to be wandering there, and thought it very hard that her cousin should have chosen to come between her and so much pleasure. 'It was provoking of him, very provoking,' she said to herself; 'she wished he had stayed in the Crimea and never come home at all to interfere with her;' and her angry feelings towards him were not much diminished, when, at the end of nearly an hour's self-imprisonment, she left her room and went off in search of some amusement.

Mary's room was the place to which she went, and finding no one there but Elinor, who was sitting over the fire reading, she opened the piano and sat down to have a long practice. She was passionately fond of music and played remarkably well; and absorbed in her occupation, she went on from one piece to another, going again and again over passages that she liked, or that were not quite perfect, until she became so interested, that she had almost forgotten, for the time, her bitter disappointment in losing the Copelands visit, but it was recalled to her mind, when, in the middle of one of Mendelssohn's 'Lieder ohne Worter' she heard a step behind her, a step which she knew well enough without turning her head to see who was there. That Percy was fond of music, as fond of it as she herself was, she

knew; she had heard him say sometimes how much he liked it, and she had often seen him lay down his book or paper, when there was any going on in the evening; but she had no inclination now to gratify his fancy. He had come into the room when passing, attracted by her style of playing, and struck by the taste and pathos with which she lingered over passages which happened to be particular favourites of his, but no sooner did she become aware of his presence, than, with childish petulance, she resolved that her performance should not be the source of any pleasure to him. With this praiseworthy resolution there came an end to all melody and beauty of expression in what she played—she hurried over the finest parts, and false notes, discordant basses, and jarring sounds of all sorts followed each other in rapid succession, until Elinor, who had exclaimed several times at this 'excruciating process,' looked up in despair.

'Do leave off that noise, Lisa,' she said, angrily. 'What are you doing to-day to make yourself so disagreeable? I declare I can't stay any longer, if you are going to play in th t way.'

'I don't know this piece,' Lisa remarked, innocently, 'and I must practise it. Mrs. Dalton will be angry if I can't play it properly on Friday.' And off she went rattling over the keys again, setting her finger down to begin with on a sharp instead of a flat, and making both her hearers wince visibly by this slight mistake.

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meadows at Copelands, and the sunny dingles there, where the trees were budding fast, and where big clusters of primroses lay hidden among the moss and in the hollows of the old stumps; and she longed to be wandering there, and thought it very hard that her cousin should have chosen to come between her and so much pleasure. 'It was provoking of him, very provoking,' she said to herself; 'she wished he had stayed in the Crimea and never come home at all to interfere with her;' and her angry feelings towards him were not much diminished, when, at the end of nearly an hour's self-imprisonment, she left her room and went off in search of some amusement.

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'If you don't know it, I can't think why you play it in

such a hurry,' said Elinor; 'you wouldn't make half so many mistakes if you took your time about it. Do pray have mercy on my ears, and don't rush through it at that helter-skelter pace.'

A request to which Lisa would not have paid the slightest attention, but that Percy, either guessing how matters stood, or perhaps imagining that the presence of a listener to whom she was not accustomed, disturbed and confused her, thought it better to leave the room; and satisfied with having driven him away, she resumed her ordinary style of playing, and Elinor heard no more of the discordant sounds which had been such a trial to her nerves.

The cold which Lisa had taken proved a most severe one, and from having been neglected at first, hung about her for a long time. For two or three days, indeed, she was confined to her own room, and even when she was well enough to come down stairs again, she was kept a prisoner to the house by her uncle's advice, until the weather should be warmer. A most refractory patient she proved herself, always running about the cold passages, standing at open windows, or slipping out into the garden when unobserved; and how she scrambled into health again in spite of all her imprudence, was a perfect marvel. But she did, and when, one fine morning in April, she went out legitimately for the first time, she was almost wild with delight, racing up and down the green walk under the lime-trees with her skipping-rope,

while old Bär, the great shaggy house-dog, lounged after her in a state of lazy satisfaction. She danced, and ran, and skipped, until for the time being, she appeared to have tired herself out, and then she sat down upon one of the lower steps of a ladder which had been left standing against the garden wall, and while resting there she began to sing, as if she found it necessary even when sitting still, to have some outlet for her overflowing spirits. Her voice was low, but it was very true and sweet, and as she sat leaning carelessly back, looking up into the April sky of clouds and blue above her head, and going from one old ballad to another almost without pause, she was not aware of the pleasure that her performance was giving to some one else besides herself and Bär, whom she had supposed to be her only auditor. It was not for a long time, and only when happening to raise herself slightly, that in the middle of 'Auld Robin Gray,' she became aware that she was not alone. With his back against a tree close by, stood her cousin Percy, not looking at her, for his head was bent and his arms folded, as if he were lost in thought, but the start with which he roused himself when she paused, showed that he had been an attentive listener, and Lisa's face flushed as she caught sight of him. She sat upright at once, and her glance at him was half shy, half defiant. She had neither forgotten nor forgiven his interference with regard to her Copelands visit, and having come into collision with him also several times since (owing entirely,

it must be confessed, to caprice and wilfulness on her part, for the offence on his had been unintentional), her feelings towards him were by no means friendly. She kept her position on the ladder, but after that first glance, she took no more notice of him, and sat silent.

'I am not disturbing you, am I?' he said, after a pause, and something in his face seemed to say that he would be glad for her to go on. But she did not see him, she was looking up into the trees again, and he had to repeat his words before she seemed to hear him.

'Not in the least,' she said; then, 'you have as good a right to be here, I suppose, as I have.' And she went on making her observations as if oblivious of his presence.

'If I am not disturbing you, why should you let me stop your singing? You were giving me great pleasure, Lisa.'

'Was I?' her eye danced, though she looked very grave.

'You are tired, I suppose?'

'No, not at all—only I don't care to go on now.' The air and tone were too unmistakably childish for him to take the rebuff in the spirit in which it was intended. She could almost have fancied, indeed, that he smiled.

'Do you never care to amuse your friends?' he said, quietly.

'*My friends*—yes.' The emphasis was marked. 'But they never ask me to sing,' she added, after a glance to see that the first part of her sentence was not lost upon

him, 'I have never learnt to sing, so nobody wants to hear me.'

'Never learned! Then I am sure you ought to take lessons. It would be a great pity not to cultivate your voice; and you are fond of music, I know.'

Lisa pouted a little. Fond as she was of it, she hated anything like application, even to that her favourite study (the only one indeed, of which she was at all tolerant), and she always resented all attempts to impose upon her any additional work. She had done battle with every master and mistress in turn, before a fresh accomplishment had been forced upon her, and she never heard a new one mentioned, without looking with distrust upon the person so unfortunate as to suggest it. What business of Percy's was it, whether she learned singing or not? Did he want to shut her up in the house all day, and not let her enjoy herself at all, in the sunshine and among the trees? Perhaps he thought, as some other people did, that she was growing too old now, for play and amusement, and ought to be sitting down, like other young ladies, to learn to be clever; and if he once got such an idea into his head, and were to begin talking of it to her aunt, who was always preaching to her as it was, about being so childish, there would be an end at once to all peace and happiness for her. The mere thought of such a thing made her pout again, and she sat and eyed her cousin with suspicious looks, and said

to herself, that she should be very glad if he were in the trenches before Sebastopol again—a place to which her wishes had lately very often consigned him. There was no chance of his return there now, however, as she knew well enough. Particulars of the treaty that had been signed at Paris had come that very morning; she had heard nothing else talked of at the breakfast table, and all Atherstone was ringing with the news of peace. He would not go away now, she was afraid, and she was very sorry—very sorry indeed. Her next words betrayed something of what was passing in her mind, for, instead of replying to his remark about her singing, she said abruptly:

'I don't think I'm very glad the war is over—at least I am sure I'm not,' still eying him distrustfully, 'I don't like people to meddle with me, and—I suppose you won't go back to the Crimea at all now?'

'I believe not.' He came forward as he spoke, and laid his hand upon the ladder on which she was now standing, and which, during her previous meditations she had been gradually mounting backwards.

'What's that for? Why are you holding it?' she asked in great surprise. 'It's quite steady.'

'Not very—I think, too, you don't know exactly what you are doing. Are you not afraid of going so high?'

'Afraid?' She read his face. 'Why don't you say what you mean—that you think I am too old to be

climbing ladders—that I am growing up into a young lady now, and it isn't lady-like to do such things? But I don't care. I like doing them, and I am not at all afraid,' rather scornfully, and she gave such a spring upon the ladder, that he felt glad he was there to prevent its coming down, as it seemed to threaten. 'I am only a child yet, and I don't want to be anything else. I hate to be called a young lady, and not allowed to do what I like. I like to run about, and to climb and jump, and do twenty things which are not proper for young ladies. And I can't bear sitting in-doors with a lot of tiresome books before me all day, learning lessons, which never do any good, but only make my head ache. But that's what you want me to do, I know; you are as bad as Aunt Helen. I won't though. I won't learn singing or anything else that you want; and I don't see that you have any business to meddle with me. I shall do just as I like about everything, and never ask your leave for anything.'

With which assertion, and to prove, perhaps, her power of acting upon it, she turned round suddenly, and the next moment to his utter astonishment and bewilderment, she was standing on the top of the high wall, which separated the Priory garden from the adjoining churchyard. It was not a very safe place, even for a firm foot and a clear head like hers, for in addition to its great height and narrow dimensions, the stones in some places had given way with the late

winter frosts, and one or two of them looked as if about to fall. But the movement on her part, was so unexpected, that Percy had had no time to prevent it even had he wished to do so, and now he could only stand and expostulate. She evidently enjoyed his dismay, and laughed when he talked of danger, and the risk of a false step; and when he begged her to come down she laughed still more.

'As if I could fall! Why I've been up here hundreds of times. There's a nice little seat at the other end among the trees, and I come and sit up there in summer. Fall, indeed! I wonder how I could!' and she executed a graceful little 'pas de seul' on the very edge of the wall, finishing off with a swimming curtsey to him; and then she ran to coax down the white cat, whose head was seen peering over the roof of the coach-house near. She came back a moment or two afterwards with her favourite in her arms, and then fresh persuasion on his part ensued to induce her to come down. But she only stood and looked at him.

'No, thank you. I don't like being with you—you tease me. It's much pleasanter up here. It isn't proper, I know. It's very *im*proper, and I see by your face, how very bad and unladylike you think me; but I don't care. If you don't like to see me standing here you needn't look at me—you can go away. It would be much better indeed, if you did, instead of staying there, as if you thought I was coming down. But I'm not, I shan't

come for ever so long—you'll be tired of waiting for me I think, for I'm going to my little seat instead.'

She walked, or rather danced off, and finding it useless to argue with her, he did not attempt to follow her to the position which she chose to take up on one of the lime-tree boughs at the further end of the garden wall. It was evident that she was in no danger there, perilous as the place would have seemed for most people; and judging rightly that opposition was only likely to confirm her in her wilfulness, he left her to herself, and walked away. Was she really sixteen as she was said to be, or was she only the child she called herself? He seemed puzzled to decide; but before going indoors, he went to the stable, to ask to have the ladder taken back when she came down, and kept for the future under the gardener's care.

'Not that it's the least manner of use though, sir, for me to lock it up,' said old Richard. 'If Miss Lisa wants it, she's sure to get hold of it somehow. She gets everything she wants, and if she can't get it any other way, she'll watch till my back is turned and then steal my keys. She's up to anything, is Miss Lisa, and I can't scold her, she comes over one so like.'

It is to be feared that Miss Lisa often came over him, afterwards, in this particular, for the ladder was frequently to be seen in its wrong place; far more frequently than Percy was aware of. He, indeed, in his unsuspicion, most probably supposed it forgotten when

meadows at Copelands, and the sunny dingles there, where the trees were budding fast, and where big clusters of primroses lay hidden among the moss and in the hollows of the old stumps; and she longed to be wandering there, and thought it very hard that her cousin should have chosen to come between her and so much pleasure. 'It was provoking of him, very provoking,' she said to herself; 'she wished he had stayed in the Crimea and never come home at all to interfere with her;' and her angry feelings towards him were not much diminished, when, at the end of nearly an hour's self-imprisonment, she left her room and went off in search of some amusement.

Mary's room was the place to which she went, and finding no one there but Elinor, who was sitting over the fire reading, she opened the piano and sat down to have a long practice. She was passionately fond of music and played remarkably well; and absorbed in her occupation, she went on from one piece to another, going again and again over passages that she liked, or that were not quite perfect, until she became so interested, that she had almost forgotten, for the time, her bitter disappointment in losing the Copelands visit, but it was recalled to her mind, when, in the middle of one of Mendelssohn's 'Lieder ohne Worter' she heard a step behind her, a step which she knew well enough without turning her head to see who was there. That Percy was fond of music, as fond of it as she herself was, she

herself sometimes that she was sure he looked very black at some of the outrages perpetrated, she never had the satisfaction of feeling quite certain that she had really roused the fiery spirit of which she had heard so much.

There was one way, however, in which after a time, she found that she could annoy him most seriously, and having made this discovery she was not slow in taking advantage of it. He had very high ideas of what a woman ought to be, and nothing shocked him more than any approach to 'fast' or unfeminine conduct in a girl; and Lisa, who had read his looks rightly on the day she mounted the garden wall, saw his disapprobation afterwards of many things that she did. She soon discovered that some of the occupations in which she delighted he considered trifling, and others unladylike; that he thought it a great pity, too, that she did not take more interest in her studies, and had such an aversion to any quiet amusements; and he made some remarks to Mary one day on the subject which she did not like at all. It was one of the very few occasions on which she had ever heard him express himself strongly, and although what he said was not addressed to her, she knew very well how he meant it to be taken. She was very angry, and for the future both to revenge herself and for the pleasure of vexing him, and seeing how grave he could look, she took care always to make the most of all her exploits; talked of swinging on five-

meadows at Copelands, and the sunny dingles there, where the trees were budding fast, and where big clusters of primroses lay hidden among the moss and in the hollows of the old stumps; and she longed to be wandering there, and thought it very hard that her cousin should have chosen to come between her and so much pleasure. 'It was provoking of him, very provoking,' she said to herself; 'she wished he had stayed in the Crimea and never come home at all to interfere with her;' and her angry feelings towards him were not much diminished, when, at the end of nearly an hour's self-imprisonment, she left her room and went off in search of some amusement.

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it. There was one of her cousins, indeed, Isabel, who was an artiste in this as in many other things, but from some cause or other, she and Lisa had never got on well together, and the latter did not like to apply to her for assistance. Besides, she was away now; she had been from home for some months: so Lisa had worked on alone, poring over and admiring various etchings and engravings that she found about the house, and doing her best to gain from them some knowledge of the art, though often half discouraged by the ill-success of her endeavours, and always longing to have some one to apply to in her perplexities.

When her cousin Percy came home, she speedily discovered that he knew all about what she so much wished to learn, and if he had been anyone else, she would have lost no time in asking questions on many a difficult point which had hitherto baffled her most assiduous attempts; but shyness at first had kept her from seeking his help, and afterwards when she began to suspect that he would be glad to see her interested in any such employment, she most resolutely determined that he should not have that satisfaction; and even gave it up altogether, that she might run no risk of being discovered indulging in it. It was a foolish whim on her part, and one by which she lost some pleasure; for so resolved was she that he should not guess her predilection for anything of the sort, that though longing to look at the many sketches he had made when

meadows at Copelands, and the sunny dingles there, where the trees were budding fast, and where big clusters of primroses lay hidden among the moss and in the hollows of the old stumps; and she longed to be wandering there, and thought it very hard that her cousin should have chosen to come between her and so much pleasure. 'It was provoking of him, very provoking,' she said to herself; 'she wished he had stayed in the Crimea and never come home at all to interfere with her;' and her angry feelings towards him were not much diminished, when, at the end of nearly an hour's self-imprisonment, she left her room and went off in search of some amusement.

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CHAPTER VI.

A WILFUL SPRITE.

IT was one afternoon some little time after this that Percy happened to go over to Copelands on business for his father, and stayed when he had finished it to walk round the farm with Mr. Pye. He was not aware that any of the party from the Priory were there, and was rather surprised in a distant meadow to come upon Lane with the two younger girls and Georgie, all harmlessly engaged in gathering cowslips. Not Lisa, however; she was not with them, nor did he see her anywhere near.

'Oh, Lisa is riding,' remarked Constance in answer to his enquiries. 'Here she is coming across the field now.' And in fact at that moment up cantered Lisa, mounted without saddle on Mr. Pye's fine hunter. There was no such a thing, indeed, in the house, as a lady's saddle, but that was nothing to her—she could ride as well, or better, without one; and fearless and high-spirited by nature, she delighted in a gallop on a horse as restless and spirited as herself, and laughed at the idea of any danger in so doing.

Mr. Pye shook his head as she came up.

'Ah, Miss Lisa, at it again! And you know it's not right. I've told you over and over again that horse is too much for you. You've no business to mount him —you'll have an accident some day, and then you'll be sorry you've not taken my advice and kept off his back.'

'So you say every time I ride him,' said Lisa, gaily. 'The first day I got on you told me I should break my neck, but here I am alive and well in spite of all your prophecies. No, thank you,' backing a little as he tried to persuade her to dismount, 'I haven't half had my ride. I don't mean to get down yet.' And with a glance at Percy who seemed on the point of saying something, she gave the rein to her horse and cantered off again.

Mr. Pye looked a little puzzled, as if not exactly knowing what to do next. 'That's the way with her, sir,' he said, turning to Percy. 'She's wilful-like, and will do as she pleases. Say what I will, I can't keep her off that horse, and it's not safe for her to be riding of him as she does. Her hand is not strong enough; and he has a bad trick, too, of shying at times. I'm thinking of getting rid of him again if I could find anyone to give me my price—but that's a chance. He's a fine animal, too, and a good goer, but he's not the sort I want, and he's not a lady's horse. I don't like to see Miss Lisa on him, but I can't stop her. She hasn't the

least bit of fear in her about that or anything else, and she will have her own way, so that all I say goes for nothing. I've thought sometimes of speaking to the doctor, but I've not seen him lately. Perhaps though, sir, if you spoke to her it would do as well; she'd mind you, may be, when she pays no attention to me; but if she's not stopped in some way, we shall have an accident sure enough, and I shall be right sorry for that. She's a sweet pretty creature, and me and my wife are as fond of her as if she was our own. I don't like to see her so careless and daresome-like.'

Percy's brow knitted. 'I will speak to her,' he said, as, with his glass up to his eye, he followed Lisa's movements at the other end of the meadow. 'She shall not do it again.'

He walked back to the house with the farmer, and waited until Lisa, who in the meantime kept carefully out of reach, had finished her ride, and chose to come back also. She rode into the yard at a very leisurely pace, and looked at Mr. Pye with a bright smile while she stroked and patted the horse's neck, and then she slipped down without taking any notice of her cousin who was coming up to offer his assistance. He examined the horse for a few moments in silence, and afterwards followed her as she was going into the house to say good-bye to Mrs. Pye, and join Lane who was waiting for her there. He looked very grave, and probably she had her suspicions as to what was coming,

for she kept as far away from him as possible while they walked up the garden, and appeared to be quite taken up with admiring the jonquils and anemones with which the borders were crowded.

'I am afraid you will have to give up your rides, Lisa,' he said at last, having apparently made up his mind to do what was not very pleasant. 'That horse is not meant for a lady, and it is not safe for you to be riding him as you have done. I hope you will not attempt it again.'

Lisa shrugged her shoulders a little pettishly.

'Thank you, but I am not at all afraid. And I am quite able to take care of myself, Captain Tennent, without troubling you to look after me—much obliged to you all the same,' she added, ironically.

Percy bit his lip. 'If you are not afraid, Lisa, others must be for you; and for their sakes I must beg you to give up an amusement which is not safe. My father would not approve of these rides, I am sure, if he knew of them; nor would Mrs. Tennent. I do hope, therefore, that you will not persist in them.'

Lisa laughed rather disdainfully. 'I am sorry you should be disappointed, but really I don't feel at all inclined to give them up. I enjoy them very much, and shall do as I like about them; and if they don't meet with your approval, it is a pity, but I can't help it. You must not expect me to consult your wishes in everything.'

'Not my wishes, but what is safe and proper. Your own good sense, Lisa, surely must tell you that you ought to give them up when you know they are not safe.'

'My own good sense tells me that you are extremely fond of interfering with me, Captain Tennent; and really I don't know who gave you the right to do it, or what concern it is of yours whether I choose to ride or not. Even if I like to break my neck, as that dear old croaker prophesies I shall, it will be no business of yours. Pray leave me to act for myself, and don't think it so very necessary to be always looking after me. When I want your advice I will ask for it, but until I do perhaps you will be kind enough not to interfere.'

Percy looked grave. 'I have no wish to interfere with you in general,' he said, 'and I am sorry to be obliged to do so now. But I cannot leave you to yourself as you wish, Lisa, in this; I should think it wrong to let you run any more such risks. If you consider, though, that it is no business of mine, the best way will be to ask my father what he thinks about it; he has certainly a right to keep you out of danger, even if I have none.'

There was no answer to this. Lisa only raised her head a little, and walked on rather faster than before; and when they left the farm afterwards and set off on their return home, she chose to loiter behind with Lane and Georgie, and let Susan and Constance get on as

quickly as they liked with their brother. At the hall door, however, she found him again waiting for her.

'You were not serious in what you said just now, Lisa? You will give them up?' he said, as she was passing him.

'Give what up?' she asked, carelessly, and beginning to untie her bonnet-strings with a most provoking air of indifference. 'Oh, my rides, do you mean? How you do go on about them to be sure! I thought we had done once, and now you are beginning again. Of course I don't intend to give them up; I told you so before.'

'And I am to speak to my father, then?'

'If you please. I don't care in the least what you do. Pray interfere as much as you like, if it will give you any pleasure. I should be quite sorry to deprive you of such a gratification.'

A queen could not have looked more dignified than did that little wilful beauty; and so pretty, too, was she in her wilfulness, that, in spite of his annoyance, Percy's eye lingered on her admiringly. But he said no more, and with a proud step, and a curious smile on her face, she glided past him and disappeared up the staircase, humming some tune as she went.

It was unfortunate for both parties that Mary, who would have set things right at once, happened to be away, having gone into the country that very morning to spend two or three days with some friends. Percy

had therefore no alternative but to appeal to his father, and Lisa, who for some reason or other had persuaded herself that he would never think of carrying out his threat, was surprised and anything but pleased on being told by her uncle at breakfast the next morning, that she must have nothing more to do with Mr. Pye's horse; her rides must cease from that day forth. He spoke decidedly, and Mrs. Tennent repeated the command, adding besides a great deal more in the shape of a general lecture, to which Lisa paid no attention. She was too angry to listen; and although she said nothing, the look of defiance which she cast across the table at Percy spoke volumes, and might have warned him how little submission was to be expected from her. She was boiling over, indeed, with wrath against him. 'Did he think he was going to order her about, and make her do as he liked? Perhaps he thought she was his slave, or one of his soldiers, and that he had only to give his commands and they were to be obeyed. But he was mistaken, and so he would find before long!' And in a fierce state of pent-up anger and indignation she dashed away the moment breakfast was over, and flew to Mary's room. There she marched up and down for some time, according to her usual fashion when in a passion; until at last, happening to see some of Percy's drawings which had most unfortunately been left upon a table near, she rushed on them in her childish rage, and, tearing them all into fragments, tossed them out of the

window. She did cool down a little then as she watched the last of them caught away by the wind and carried over the garden wall; for she began to wonder whether she had not gone a little too far, and whether they were any that he cared about particularly. Whatever they had been, however, there was an end of them now, and if he liked to be angry he might; she should not care, and at any rate it was only returning tit for tat. With which amiable reflection she drew a chair to the table, and, sitting down much more calmly than she had come into the room, began to scribble an exercise for Madame as the commencement of her morning studies.

Two days after that, Percy was once more at Copelands, and, not finding Mr. Pye near the house, set off across some meadows in search of him. He was standing under some trees on the banks of a stream, in one of the fields, looking round with his glass to see if the farmer were near, when the sound of horse's hoofs coming rapidly up on the turf on the opposite side made him turn. It was not without a misgiving that he did so, and his first glance told him that his suspicions were correct. Little as he had imagined her capable of acting so directly in opposition to her uncle's wishes, it was no other than Lisa who was there, and who without seeing him, for she was looking in another direction, cantered up and down for some minutes on the high bank on the other side of the brook, appear- to enjoy to the utmost her forbidden ride. Percy's

brow clouded visibly as he watched her; and when, still unaware of his presence—for the tree under which he stood concealed him from her view—she suddenly put her horse to a gallop, and cleared the stream at a leap in its widest part, almost close to the place where he stood, he walked forward with an air of cool and resolute determination, and laid his hand on her bridle. His unlooked-for appearance evidently took her by surprise, for her colour rose for a moment. She speedily recovered herself, however.

'Good morning, Captain Tennent,' she said then with a smile, and making him a little bow, 'I didn't expect to see you here. Did you come to prevent my ride? Because if so, I am sorry to say, you are too late. I have been out for more than an hour, and have enjoyed myself exceedingly. You should have been here a little sooner.'

'You are mistaken, Lisa; my coming had nothing to do with you. After what my father said the other day, I did not think my interference would have been necessary again. I thought his wishes would have been quite enough, without—'

'*His* wishes; yours, you mean,' retorted Lisa, scornfully, 'I should have had my rides in peace; I should have heard nothing from him, if you had not thought proper to interfere, and try to put an end to my pleasure. And very kind it was of you, I must say. But as I don't feel at all obliged to have your

permission for everything I like to do, you must not be surprised if I act for myself sometimes. And now let me go, if you please,' with a little impatient flourish of her whip. 'You needn't stand with your hand there, for I mean to have my ride out, and it's not half over yet.'

'Lisa, this is trifling—mere childishness. You must get down.' His tone was quiet, but there was no mistaking the decision of it, and her eyes began to flash.

'*Must!* How dare you say "must" to me? Do you think I am going to obey *you*?'

'Not me—but my father. He wishes it, Lisa; he has forbidden these rides, and you ought to give them up.'

Her colour rose. '*Ought!* Yes, because *you* wish it. Don't talk of my uncle's wishes; he had none till you interfered. And don't fancy that I am going to mind you. You must find some one else, Captain Tennent, to listen to your "musts" and your "oughts", for I won't—they are nothing to me. And now let me go;' very haughtily. She jerked at her bridle as she spoke, but his hand was firm upon it, and the only effect of the movement was to make her horse start and attempt to rear.

'It won't do, Lisa—you must get down.'

'You can't keep me if I don't wish to stay,' she exclaimed, growing still more excited. 'Let me go directly.' And caring little what she did to free

herself, she raised her whip, and with all her force struck him so sharply across his ungloved hand that he was taken by surprise and let the bridle fall. It was only for a moment, and the next he attempted to catch it again, but he missed, and Lisa's ringing laugh was one of triumph at his failure.

'Ah, Captain Tennent, "it won't do,"' repeating his words mockingly, 'you will have to go back alone, and I hope you'll enjoy the walk. Good-bye.' And she rode off, looking round as she went to nod gaily to him, and say something else which she was too far away for him to hear.

But alas for poor Lisa! Her triumph was of short duration. Her laugh was still sounding in his ear, and her eyes were still dancing with glee at her own escape and his discomfiture, when the report of a gun in a neighbouring wood startled her horse and made him shy suddenly. Riding carelessly as she was, it was a movement for which she was totally unprepared, and losing her balance she was flung to the ground with great force, and lay there stunned and motionless.

It was not for many minutes, however; and Percy, who had seen and been horrified at the accident, had hardly time to reach the spot where she was lying, before her senses began to return, and although confused at first, and unable to remember what had happened, she raised herself a little, and sat up. The



sight of her cousin then by her side seemed to recal her at once to herself, for the colour came back to her face, and she turned away with an expression of evident annoyance.

'I am not hurt,' she said, coldly. 'You needn't look so frightened. There is nothing at all the matter with me.' But the bewildered way in which she raised her hand to her head as she spoke, rather contradicted her assertion.

'I don't think you know yet whether you are hurt or not,' Percy answered, gravely, but with a kindness that would have touched her, had she not been too much confused then to notice it. 'At any rate you must not lie here: you must let me carry you back to the house, and then we shall find out what you have done. I hope, as you say, it *is* nothing.'

'Thank you, I hope so too,' said Lisa, not too much subdued even then to be ironical. 'As for being carried, though, I am much obliged to you, but I prefer walking. I think I can do that quite as well as, if not better, than yourself.' And she smiled a little, for her cousin's habit of using a stick when he first came home had been a constant source of amusement to her, and even now he walked stiffly. He made no answer, however, to this remark, and would have helped her to rise, but she pushed away his offered hand, and appeared quite offended at the idea of his supposing that she wanted any assistance. When she

had raised herself, however, with some difficulty, and tried to set her foot on the ground, the involuntary shudder and exclamation of pain that escaped her told where she was hurt—in one place at least; and if Percy had not caught her, she would have fallen again. Her face was very white then, and he saw that she was nearly fainting; and without another word, he lifted her in his arms as he would have lifted a little child, and carried her back to the farm. She was not much more than a child, indeed, and very light; and half unconscious as she was she could make no resistance to a proceeding which she had before regarded with so much disdain. He had carried her into the house, and laid her on the large old-fashioned sofa in Mrs. Pye's kitchen, almost before she knew where she was, or what was being done with her, and then he took off her bonnet, and fetched her some water which he made her drink, and which brought the colour back to her face and did her good; though the pain from her foot was growing worse every moment, and she still felt dizzy, and bewildered. And then Mrs. Pye herself came bustling in, all alarm at the accident, and suggesting remedies of every sort; the worst of which, in Lisa's opinion, she insisted upon administering at once, namely, a large bottle of smelling salts—the very best thing, as she declared, for faintness. Lisa writhed at first under the infliction, and ended by pushing the bottle away in desperation; and then she

implored to have her boot taken off—a work of difficulty, for her foot was swelling very fast, and she could hardly bear to have it touched. Mrs. Pye's attempts, indeed, all failed, for she was so afraid of giving pain that, in her very anxiety to avoid doing so, she gave far more than was necessary; but Percy came to the rescue at last, and in spite of Lisa's remonstrances, slit her boot open down the front with his pen-knife, and drew it off without more ado. The relief to her foot from the removal of the pressure was very great, but with the momentary cessation from pain came thoughts of what she would have to bear from her aunt's anger, when the accident was known at home, and her reflections on that score were not pleasant. They made her feel vexed and angry, and she threw herself back with an impatient gesture, and drew her foot away when her cousin, after removing the boot, would have liked to ascertain more particularly the extent of the injury, that something might be done to lessen the pain.

'Oh, no, leave me alone; don't touch me,' she exclaimed, pettishly. 'You only hurt me and you can do no good. Just go away please and leave me to myself. You have done all you can and now you maygo, and be quite happy that everything has happened as you said it would. It would have been a pity if it hadn't; it would have been a great pity if all your wise prophecies and everybody else's hadn't come to pass. And of

course you are very glad they have, if only to show how wise you are and how foolish I am. Yes, I know exactly what you think about it, and how glad you are that it has happened. I can see it in your face, and how you think it serves me quite right. Ah, well, you may think so if you like, and be as glad as you like; I shan't care,' she added, with fierce impatience, and there came another jerk backwards among the pillows which Mrs. Pye had heaped up behind her.

'You are mistaken, Lisa; I am very sorry for you,' was all he said; and angry as she was, she was softened by the tone in which those few words were spoken. She was silent, and he turned away, and writing a few lines in pencil on a slip of paper, he asked to have them taken to the Priory, and then made enquiries for Lane, who was somewhere about the farm. Mrs. Pye herself went out in search of her, and, left alone with her cousin, Lisa felt no inclination to break the pause which followed. She was beginning, indeed, to see that she had behaved very badly, that what had happened had been entirely the result of her own wilful conduct; and, between pain and self-reproach, she found it a hard matter to keep back her tears. She almost wished that Percy would have found fault with her, that he would have said—no matter what, so that she could have had a pretext for being angry. Her spirit would have kept her up then, and helped her to bear and to brave everything; but to meet with pity when she deserved

blame, and kindness instead of upbraiding, was what she had not expected, and she began to feel very miserable and very penitent. She lay back with her eyes closed, and tried hard to bear the pain she was suffering quietly and patiently, for that was the only way, she thought, in which she could at all make up for what now she most heartily wished could be undone. But she said nothing, and there was a long silence until she happened to look up once and found Percy standing at the foot of the sofa, watching her with such an absorbed, earnest gaze that he seemed to have forgotten where he was. He started as his eye met hers, and then, as she turned her head away with a very weary sigh, he came up to her side and asked if there were nothing he could do for her.

'No, nothing, thank you; but I should like—oh, I should like, to go home. Uncle Henry would do something for this pain, I think, and ——' Her voice faltered, and she had to bite her lip and clench her hands tightly to keep back the cry which was almost wrung from her at that moment. 'When do you think I may go?' she said, after a pause and speaking almost humbly. 'Can it be soon? I don't think I can bear this much longer.'

Percy took a turn across the room before he answered: 'My father will be here in a short time, I expect,—if he were at home, that is, when they got my note. If not, they will send the carriage for you. I wish they had had a conveyance of any sort here to take you back in,

and you should have gone at once. But I hope you will not have to wait very long, they are sure to be here in a few minutes.'

Lisa's look was a very grateful one. 'Thank you, I don't mind it so much now. I can wait very well. I didn't know before what you had done.' And she closed her eyes again and lay very patiently till Lane made her appearance, out of breath and in a decidedly excited state at the account she had received from Mrs. Pye of the accident. Lisa was her favourite, her peculiar pet among all her charges at the Priory, a fact easily accounted for from her having been with Mrs. Kennedy at the time of her birth, and having had the sole charge of her for some years afterwards. And when, in consequence of many unhappy circumstances, Lisa had been transferred to her uncle's home, Lane had come with her, and Mrs. Tennent being in want of a head-nurse at that time, she had entered upon that capacity and filled it ever since. But although she had seen many children born in her new service, and had nursed and tended them all with unwearied care and love, there was not one who so entirely engrossed all her thoughts and won her warmest feelings, as the child to whom her affection had first been given. Not even Georgie, whom she petted and spoiled to an unlimited extent, as old nurses only know how to do, not even he was half so much to her as was Lisa—Lisa who tormented her, and tyrannised over her, and gave her no end of trouble, and who was

all the dearer to her, perhaps, on that very account. She came in now in a sad state of bewilderment and dismay, too much frightened even to give the scolding with which, in spite of all her fondness, she would have greeted her darling at any other time; nor did Lisa's pale face and evident suffering tend to re-assure her, but as nothing could be done, she could only stand by and commiserate, until at last, to the relief of everybody, the carriage arrived. It was a disappointment that Dr. Tennent did not come with it, but he was not at home, so the only thing was to get Lisa back as fast as possible. Percy accordingly carried her out, and having placed her in the carriage, and put Lane and Georgie in after her, he sent them off, promising to bring home the two little girls himself.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE SOFA.

LISA'S hurt proved to be the fracture of some of the small bones of the foot, besides several very bad contusions—rather a serious accident altogether, her uncle seemed to think it, though the wonder was, he said, that it was not much worse. She must make up her mind, however, to be a prisoner for some time, and not attempt to leave the sofa without permission, or she might perhaps lame herself for life. This injunction was to Lisa the worst part of all. She had borne the pain of having the bones set, and the suffering that had gone before, without a tear and almost without a word; but when she heard that it would be very long, weeks most likely, before she could run or walk again; and that she must not think of going out or having any of the pleasures in which she so much delighted, she felt that she was really punished then, and she cried very bitterly. But she kept her tears to herself, and did not let anyone see them; and when Percy went up into Mary's room after dinner that evening, to ask how she

was, she had resumed her old defiant manner, and gave but very short answers to his enquiries.

'Her foot did not pain her nearly so much now—it was much better; but her head ached and she was tired,' and she evidently meant this as a hint that his presence there was not desired, for she turned away as he spoke, and looked as if she would much rather be alone. He said no more, and left the room almost immediately, and she did not see him again until the following afternoon, when he happened to come in just as Mary, who had returned a short time before, was sitting on the sofa by her side, listening to her excited and penitent account of what had happened. She was vexed at the interruption, and still more so when, instead of going again, as he ought to have done, he chose to stay and look for something that he wanted. Of course, though, he could not guess that he was disturbing any particular conversation, or that she was wishing him gone; and he went on hunting among books and papers on the different tables while she watched him with great impatience, but without having any idea at first that a word from her would soon have put an end to his search. It came out at length, however, when, after poking about for some minutes in his blind way, he turned to Mary and asked if she had done anything with some drawings that they had been looking at a few days before.

'I must have left them here, for I can't find them in

my portfolio, though I thought I put them back,' he said. 'Have you seen them anywhere?'

Mary shook her head. 'Which do you mean? Not Captain Carleton's?'

'Yes—those two of his and one of my own. I don't care for mine, it's of no consequence, but I wouldn't have his lost for anything. I don't think I have another.'

'Oh, they are not lost,' said Mary, getting up; 'I shall soon find them. My eyes are better than yours, you know, and I dare say you have overlooked them somewhere. Perhaps they have been put among the music.' And she began a search in various places, while Lisa watched her movements for a minute or two in blank consternation. Until that moment she had quite forgotten what she had done in her fit of passion a few mornings before. Like everything else, it had passed out of her head directly her anger was over, and she had never given it another thought, or even felt any compunction for having so ruthlessly made away with property that was not her own, until her cousin's present enquiry recalled it to her mind; and his words and the tone in which they were spoken, led her to suspect all the mischief she might have done by her hasty and unwarrantable action. Like half the other things, too, that she did in her effervescing moods, she would have been glad enough to undo it now in a more sober one, but unfortunately, as was generally the case, it was too late, and as she never dreamed of keeping any

of her misdemeanours a secret, the only thing was to confess it at once, humiliating as such an avowal must be; and all the more so because her aunt, who happened to come into the room at that moment, must hear it too. But she could not let the search go on, so she broke out in desperation: 'It's no use looking for them, Mary, you won't find them. They are gone. I tore them up the other day.' Her face grew crimson and she did not dare look at Percy as she made this announcement.

'Tore them up! My dear Lisa, you surely didn't do such a thing?' exclaimed Mary, in accents of dismay; while Mrs. Tennent asked what they were talking about.

'Some drawings of Percy's,' said Mary. 'But, Lisa, you must be mistaken. You never could have torn them up—you must have seen what they were.'

'I know I did. But I was angry; I did it on purpose.'

'Did it on purpose! Oh, Lisa!' And Mary's tone had as much of reproach in it as perhaps it ever could have. But Percy was silent, though if Lisa had seen his face just then, she would have been even more sorry than she was for her heedless burst of passion. He turned away and walked to the window.

If he were silent, however, not so Mrs. Tennent when she understood fully what had happened, and it certainly was not without reason that Lisa had dreaded

her being present at her confession. She was very much displeased, and overwhelmed her niece with reproaches which had the effect of reducing her, not into a sullen state exactly, for she never was in that, but into a sort of care-for-nothing, impenetrable mood, when she might have been talked at the whole day without having the least impression made upon her, and when all her sorrow and all her better feelings were fast vanishing under the influence of harsh words. But at this juncture Percy turned back from the window.

'Will you oblige me, Mrs. Tennent, by saying no more about it? It can't be helped now, and Lisa had no idea, I am sure, of what she was doing. She knew nothing about them, and could not tell that they were of any particular value to me.'

Lisa looked up at this speech. 'I did know what I was doing,' she said, very decidedly; 'I didn't know that you cared about them in particular, but I knew what I was doing well enough, and I meant to do it. I did it to vex you because you had made me angry, and I hoped it would vex you very much; I did it on purpose for that.'

Mrs. Tennent stood aghast at this announcement, and the coolness with which it was made.

'Really, Lisa, I should like to know what is to be done with you,' she said at last, when she had in some measure recovered from her astonishment. 'I can't imagine what you will come to next, for it seems to me that you are totally devoid of principle. It is bad enough to act with

wilful disobedience, but when it comes to malice too, it is carrying things too far. I don't——' She was stopped by Percy.

'If you would be kind enough to say nothing more about it, it would oblige me very much. I am sorry that I was so unfortunate as to offend Lisa in any way, but I can't believe that this was done from anything but thoughtlessness. At any rate the loss is mine, and the best way will be to forget it as soon as I can.'

He left the room, and Mrs. Tennent went away also without further remark, though her looks said volumes. But Lisa did not see them; she was erking over the leaves of a book that she had in her hand, and doing her best to appear totally unconcerned and indifferent. She could hold out no longer, however, in this way, when, after a time, she raised her eyes and found Mary watching her pityingly and almost sadly.

'Oh! Mary, you will hate me,' she exclaimed then; 'I am just as bad as bad can be, and I shall never be any better. You may as well give me up and have nothing more to do with me, for you see it's all of no use. I've been dreadfully wicked and done everything just as I liked, without caring whether it were right or wrong; and what's the use of being sorry now, it won't undo it all, though I'm sure I wish it could. You don't believe me, perhaps—you think I am always saying so, but it's true for all that.'

'Yes, I know it is,' said Mary, who understood exactly

how it had all happened—how Lisa, led away by her own strong will and heedless impetuosity, had forgotten everything for the time but her determination to carry out her wishes, and, now that the excitement was over, was regretting the past most heartily—'I know it is, and I am very sorry for you.' And at these words all Lisa's own sorrow broke forth in a torrent of tears and self-reproaches. She would not have cared so much, she said, if it were only her wilfulness about her rides that she had to be sorry for, because she was punished for that in being obliged to lie there so long and miss the best time of the year for being out of doors. 'It is very hard, Mary, to have to do that—look at the sunshine on the lawn now, and on the lime trees in the green walk; and look at Bär there sitting on the gravel path, snapping at the flies as they come about him: I should like to be having a race with him instead of lying here. It looks so warm and pleasant that I am longing to be out. I have been thinking of it all the morning; but I thought, too, that it was my own fault, and that the only way I could show I was sorry for having been so bad, was by being patient and not feeling cross for what serves me right. It would make up a little, I thought, for having done what I ought not; but I can't make up for having been so angry and tearing up those things in such a rage. I don't know what Percy thinks of me, and I am afraid he cares for them very much. Somebody had given them to him, I suppose?'

'Yes, a friend of his who died in India two or three years ago.'

'Died! Is he dead?' and Lisa looked shocked. 'Was he any very particular friend though, or only——'

'A common one,' suggested Mary; 'no, I don't think Percy has any friends of that kind, or if he has he don't call them friends, they are only acquaintance. But this one was different, they were like brothers I believe. Not always,' she added, as if recalling something to mind, 'but latterly. Percy was terribly cut up when he died.'

Lisa was silent for a long time. 'He will never forgive me,' she said at last.

Mary smiled. 'You had better ask him; he is not so very unforgiving in general.'

'No, but such a thing as this. I wish, Mary, you could tell him how sorry I am, and that I really didn't know he had any particular reason for caring about those drawings. I am sure I wouldn't have torn them up if I had known it; at least I don't think I should, even though I—don't like him,' she was about to have added, but she stopped herself—'even though I was so angry with him. I am very sorry now; I am indeed. I would give anything not to have done it. Won't you tell him so?'

'Yes, if you like, I will.' And Mary most probably told her brother not only that, but a good deal more which Lisa never guessed. The next time she saw him, he said, rather stiffly—

'I hope you won't think anything more about those drawings, Lisa, I should be very sorry for you to go on vexing yourself for a thing that can't be helped, and I am quite sure you had not the least idea they were of any consequence to me. You must not trouble yourself about them any more.'

She looked up with a blush. If he had been any one else or had spoken less gravely, she would have burst out at once with all the regret she felt for the consequences of her passion, and would never have rested until she was sure that she was really forgiven, but his cold and formal tone checked her usual eagerness, and she only said: 'I am very sorry; and more sorry still since Mary told me about them, and why you cared for them. I wish I had never been so angry.'

It was all she could get out, though vexed with herself for saying so little and appearing so indifferent. 'But it's not my fault,' she thought; 'if he didn't look so dreadfully grave I could tell him a great deal more. I would let him see how very sorry I really am, but I can't while he looks like that. I wonder whether he expects me to say anything else.'

Whether he did or not, did not appear. He began to talk on some other subject, and as he made no allusion to it again, she supposed that he meant to forget it himself, and intended her to do the same. But she could not feel certain that she was forgiven, and for some days she was very shy and constrained in his

presence, and hardly spoke to him, though she saw him often enough—too often, indeed, in her opinion, for when Mary was disengaged, he was very fond of coming to her room and establishing himself there with his books or mathematical instruments, or whatever else he might be busy with. At first, Lisa thought this a great bore, and generally wished him miles away, but she began by degrees to look forward to these visits, as something to relieve the tedium of many weary hours, when, tired with lying in one position and being always occupied with the same round of employments, far too quiet and unvaried to suit her active, energetic nature, she was glad of almost any change to draw her out of herself, and give her something fresh to think about.

Her studies went on as usual with Mary, and that part of the day which was taken up with them was got through very well; far better, indeed, than had been the case before, when she had always had a hundred pretexts for breaking off in the middle of anything she was doing, to amuse herself and interrupt the others. But her leisure time was the most wearisome, and often hung very heavily on her hands, fo she had an unfortunate distaste for needlework, and never took up any unless absolutely obliged to do so; and although she liked reading well enough, she got tired even of that at times, and her favourite books were often laid aside, because she did not care to open them. Percy's visits began, therefore, at length to be welcome rather than

otherwise, even if it were for nothing else than the pleasure of watching him, sometimes from curiosity and real interest in what he was doing, sometimes to have a little private fun at his expense, 'because he was so very blind and so plain.' But there was great pleasure, too, in hearing him and Mary talk, and greater still when, as was often the case, while his sister was working, he took a book to read aloud to her. Lisa could work also then, she did not mind occupying her fingers in that way when listening to anything that interested her, and she was very much interested always in what he read. One reason, perhaps was, that he read remarkably well, better than anyone she had ever heard, and also, when he found that she liked to listen, he chose out books that he thought she would care to hear, and which were most suited to her taste. Many of them she would never, perhaps, have taken up of her own accord—she would have thought them too grave, not half amusing enough, but read aloud they sounded very different, and she ended by becoming most deeply interested even in those which at first had seemed least attractive.

If these readings had answered no other purpose, they would have served that of making her wish to extend her knowledge, and of giving her a taste for the higher and better kinds of literature; but they had another effect also of which she never dreamed at the time. In the interest which they awakened, and while listening to the long discussions to which they gave rise,

she first learned to know something of her cousin, and began to lose the prejudice which she had entertained against him, and as mutual reserve wore off, she could not help acknowledging to herself, that he was by no means so disagreeable as she had always imagined him to be. She discovered, indeed, that he could be quite the contrary when he pleased, and he certainly was very kind, and took a great deal of trouble to amuse and give her pleasure when he saw that she was tired and dull, and pining for fresh air and her old liberty. He brought her wild flowers from the woods, all her favourites in profusion, which she loved far better than any garden ones, and he told her all that was going on at the farm, in which she took great interest, and supplied her with many new books and engravings which he thought she would like to see; and happening one day to see a drawing of hers that had been left about, he asked her if she would not like to have some lessons in the art, and offered to teach her. If one thing could have delighted her more than any other it was this offer. She forgot she had never meant him to know that she had any such taste, and she told eagerly now, how very fond she was of drawing, and how much she had always wished to learn. She did not know exactly, though, how it was to be managed while she was obliged to lie there; but he set to work forthwith and manufactured a board which could be fastened on the sofa, and raised or lowered as she pleased; and

furnished with this and proper materials, she took her first lesson in a state of intense and absorbed delight, which made her for the time completely oblivious of everything else. She never seemed to grow tired, indeed, of this favourite occupation, and made such progress in it as to astonish everybody, while it served to pass away many hours which she would otherwise most likely have spent in gazing out of the window, watching the play of the leaves in the wind, or the sunbeams dancing on the lawn, and vainly wishing that she were able to run and walk again, and once more enjoy the open air.

'It certainly is very kind of Percy to take so much trouble about me,' she thought. 'I wonder why he does it, for I am sure I don't deserve it. I was very rude to him, and I had no business to tear up those sketches of his; it was very wrong of me. I wonder whether he remembers anything about them; he can't have forgotten, surely, and yet he has never said a word to me since, and he is just as kind as if I had always been what I ought, and had never done or said a rude thing in my life. Really, sometimes I almost think I should begin to like him a little, if he were not so very ugly; but—ah, well, he is dreadfully plain, certainly; and after all I am not obliged to like him. I may think him kind without caring about him; and I do think that: I think him very kind—very kind indeed, and I never mean to be rude to him again.'



CHAPTER VIII.

INDIAN TALES.

'WOULD you like to go for a drive this afternoon, Lisa?' said Percy as, one very bright day early in May, he came into Mary's room, where Lisa was lying as usual, poring over some drawing that he had lent her to copy. 'We can have the carriage for an hour or two, and, if you would like to go, I will drive you over to Copelands.'

'Drive me to Copelands?' And her face flushed with surprise and pleasure. 'How delightful! Do you really mean it?'

'Yes, if you like. I have been trying to get the carriage for some days, but my father has been so busy he could not spare it. It won't be wanted, though, this afternoon, and he is glad for you to have the drive. Mary is coming with us; and if you like to take your drawing-book and pencil, you can try your hand at sketching. You were saying the other day that you wished you could do it, and this will be a good opportunity to begin.'

Lisa was very happy. The prospect of once more

being out of doors after three weeks' confinement to the house was charming; and when she found herself in the carriage that afternoon on her way to Copelands, she was brimming over with pleasure and ecstasy. Everything was delightful — the banks had never looked so green before, nor the hedgerows so fresh and beautiful—the pink and white blossoms on the apple and cherry trees were lovely; and so were the early leaves of the chestnuts and silver birches; and the glowing sunlight on distant hill and near meadow was brighter and more enchanting than she had ever known it. Her exclamations of happiness and delight seemed to amuse Percy not a little, for he kept turning to look at her, and there was something like a smile on his face as he watched the radiant expression of hers and listened to her girlish remarks. He drove slowly, too, and stopped several times, that she might see as much as she liked of anything that particularly attracted her admiration; and he waited patiently while she looked and talked, and drew Mary's attention to things which she had seen hundreds of times before, but which appeared to have come out in new beauty on that day.

'It is a great pity that you can't see it all, too,' she said at last, noticing that he was very silent, and that he seemed to be more occupied with contemplating his whip-handle than admiring the view which just then

lay before them. 'Can't you really see it at all? You must miss a great deal by being so short-sighted.'

He smiled a little and looked up. 'I suppose I do. If there is anything particular, though, to see, I will put on my glasses. I don't use them more than I can help, because they only try my eyes, but I can see well enough when I have them on. Is there anything now that I ought to look at?'

'Oh, no; nothing but what you can see every day; and I suppose you often come this way, don't you? But how very disagreeable never to be able to see things without making such a preparation for looking at them! I don't think I should care to look at anything if I couldn't see it without having to find my sight first. It must be very tiresome.'

'Is it? I don't know that I ever think about it; one gets used to everything in time. I don't often remember, now, that I could see as far as you or anybody else once.'

'Could you?' And she looked at him in some astonishment.

'Yes, till I got this sabre cut,' drawing his hand across his forehead. 'That detracted from my appearance in more ways than one; didn't it, Polly?' he added, more lightly than Lisa had ever heard him speak.

'No, I don't think so; people who don't know you may fancy so, perhaps; but I don't,' Mary answered, quickly, but with so much of earnestness in her tone

that Lisa was struck. She would have liked to ask when and how he got it, but a glance at his face prevented her. He was very grave again, and seemed to be occupied with some painful thoughts, and for some minutes she made no further remark. But when, within a short distance of the farm at Copelands, he turned off from the high road into a narrow lane, she asked where they were going.

'Only to some cottages down here. Mary has a charitable errand, I believe, at one of them; and there is another a little lower down which will be a good subject for your first sketch. We can go and look at it while she is transacting her business.'

And a very happy half-hour Lisa spent near that picturesque cottage at the corner of the lane, with its overhanging thatched roof, its lattice windows and curious old porch; and very proud she was of her sketch when it was finished, until she happened to see one that Percy himself had done in about a quarter of the time, while standing beside the carriage and directing her attempts; and then she was so much disgusted with her own that she would have torn it up on the spot, if he had not rescued it from her hands just as she was beginning the work of destruction.

'No, Lisa; that would be very absurd. You must remember that I have had years of practice, and you are only just beginning. It would be strange if I could not do better than you. And this is very good

indeed, for a first attempt, and you ought to keep it if only to see whether you improve or not. It would be ridiculous to tear it up because you are not quite satisfied with it.'

'Not satisfied at all, you mean,' remarked Lisa. 'It is just simply hideous.' But she did as she was told; rather a wonderful thing for her, considering that the person who spoke was not Mary; and, the sketch-book and pencils being put away, they went back to take up her cousin, and then proceeded to Copelands to pay their visit there.

A very short visit, for it was getting late, and almost time to return; but while Mrs. Pye came out to the carriage to speak to Lisa, Percy walked off somewhere, and was presently seen returning, bringing a very handsome Skye terrier with him.

'Oh, what a beauty! Mrs. Pye, where did you get him?' Lisa exclaimed, in an ecstasy of admiration. 'What a dear shaggy little creature! Oh, do let me look at him. I'm so fond of dogs. When did you buy him?'

'Bless you, my dear, he's none of mine,' returned Mrs Pye. 'I don't care for dogs as you do, and don't want to have any in the house. No; the farmer got him yesterday for Captain Tennent—bought him of a lady at Burnside, who's going away and don't wish to take him with her. The Captain said he'd come to-day and fetch him, so you're going to take him back with you, I suppose?'

'I hope so, I'm sure,' said Lisa, growing excited. 'Oh, put him in here, please,' as Percy came up to the carriage. 'Mrs. Pye says he is yours—he's to come with us, isn't he? And may I hold his chain? You can't do that and drive too. I'll take great care of him—he shan't jump out. Mary, did you ever see such a dear, intelligent-looking creature! And his eyes——' Speech was lost in admiration.

'Are beautiful—when you see them!' said Mary, with a laugh.

'But that's just as it ought to be,' Lisa exclaimed. 'Evidently you don't understand this kind of dog. Of course his hair ought to hang in that way; and look at them now when I push it back. How bright and knowing they are! Do you see his mouth, too? Quite black; look at the roof. Oh, he *is* a beauty!'

'I am glad you like him,' Percy said, as they drove off. 'He will be a companion for you while you are shut up so much; and I don't think you will have any trouble in making friends with him. He seems very sociably inclined.'

'Yes, I think so. He is fond of me already, I do believe. But do you really mean that I may have him upstairs with me sometimes, while I can't walk about?'

'You may have him as often as you like, and for as long as you like. To say the truth, Lisa, that was why I got him. I thought he would be an amusement to you while you are obliged to be so much of a prisoner. So you can keep him till you are tired of him, and

when you want to get rid of him, you must give him back to me.'

'And suppose I never want to get rid of him?' Lisa said, looking at him for a moment with a curious expression, half of wistfulness, half of fun, and then laying her head on the dog's rough neck, 'Suppose I never want to get rid of him?'

'Then I suppose you had better keep him altogether; he will not object to having you for his mistress, I dare say. And if you think you won't care to part with him, you may as well consider him yours at once.'

Lisa raised her head again. 'Mine? Really? But—oh, no, you can't be in earnest; you would never give him away?' And she looked at him very doubtfully.

'Why not? I did not get him for myself, certainly, and if you don't like to have him, I must find some one else to take him. But you have so few pleasures just now that I hoped he would help to amuse you a little. Of course, though, you can do as you please about keeping him.'

Lisa's astonishment was very great. 'And you got him for me? Really on purpose for me?' And then, as she read the answer in his smile, 'How very kind of you! How very, very kind! But—I can hardly believe it—I have never had a live pet of my own in my life except my poor goldfinch years ago. And a dog! I have always wished for one so much, but I never thought I should have one. How very good it was of you to

think of such a thing!' she exclaimed, in childish delight; adding, however, a moment afterwards, with a change of tone and a deepening colour, 'I don't know, though, whether I ought to have him after all. You forget that it's my own fault that I can't run about and am obliged to lie still all day. If I had done as I was told, I needn't have been shut up as I am.'

'No, I know that; it was not very wise of you, Lisa.'

'Not very wise, and not very right, either,' she said, earnestly. 'I have been very sorry for it since: sorry for that, and for a good many other things too.' And once more she laid her head down among the dog's shaggy hair. 'I wonder what his name is?' she said, after a pause, resuming her usual manner. 'I hope it's a pretty one.'

But on this subject Percy could not enlighten her, for he had forgotten to ask. He believed, however, that some one had told him it was Prince, and as the dog, when appealed to by Lisa, wagged his tail and looked knowing, the name, whether originally his or not, was set down to him at once by her. 'And a very good name it is for him too,' she remarked, 'for he is the prince of dogs, I am sure. I never saw one half so handsome before. I shall take such care of him, and I am so glad to have him! It was very kind of you to think of giving me such a pleasure; you don't know how happy I am! I only hope Aunt Helen will let me keep him; she has always taken everything away from

me before. It was very unjust of her! Whenever I got angry, she—ah, well, I won't talk about it now, for you don't like to hear me say such things, I know, Mary.' And Lisa smothered her rising resentment in hugs and caresses of her new treasure.

She was on her sofa that evening, with the dog beside her, thinking very happily of all the pleasures she had had that day, and how kind Percy had been to her, when a person who had called about some needlework was shown into the room where she was lying. Mrs. Daly was an old acquaintance, and while she was waiting for Mary, for whom the work was to be done, Lisa had many questions to ask her about herself and her family, and grew very much interested in hearing various particulars concerning them. She was struck, however, after a time, by a change in the woman's manner, and, on looking up at last to discover the cause of a very short answer she had received, she saw that Mrs. Daly's eyes were fixed upon the likeness of Percy which hung over the piano. It had arrested her attention so completely, that for some moments she evidently forgot everything else, and that she was not alone in the room. Her earnest, eager gaze surprised Lisa not a little, and at first she lay and watched her in silence, wondering what there could be there to bring that strange look to her face, and the tears to her eyes; for that there were tears she saw plainly, although they were brushed away when Mrs. Daly became aware that she was observed.

'You know that, then?' Lisa said, after a pause. 'You have seen my cousin, I suppose?'

'Yes.' The woman's face brightened. 'It's very like him,' she added, turning to the picture again. 'Like what he used to be, I mean.'

'Why, did you know him, then?' Lisa asked. 'It's a long time since that was taken.'

'Yes, but I knew him in India, Miss Lisa. He looks much older now—he is so changed that I hardly knew him when he came to see me some time ago. But that's what he was then; what he was when he saved my child—my little Ted. God bless him for it!' There were tears in her eyes again. 'May I look at it, Miss Lisa, a little nearer, quite close, if you please?' And she walked across the room, and stood gazing at it with the most intense interest. 'It's so like him—just as he used to look!' she murmured to herself.

'When was it?' Lisa asked, her curiosity excited, not only by the woman's manner, but by the keen desire she had begun to feel to learn more of her cousin than she had ever before cared to know. 'When did he save your child? Ted, you said, didn't you?—that nice big boy of yours. How was it? Tell me, won't you?' in her slightly imperious way. 'I like to hear those kind of things, and I never heard this—no one ever told me. Tell me how it was—tell me directly. You can look at that and tell me, too, you know.'

Mrs. Daly smiled a little, but she was nothing loath

to tell her tale, though she wondered Miss Lisa had not heard it before; Miss Mary knew it, and she thought everyone else did—with which preface she began a story of her past days, far too long to be given at length, but from which, divested of its embellishments, Lisa gathered the following particulars:—She had been the wife of a sergeant, and had followed him to India, where she had gone through great hardships. The incident to which she alluded had occurred in the second Sikh war, when, in the hurry and confusion consequent upon the evacuation of some fort, her child, then not much more than a year old, had been overlooked and left behind. She was ill herself at the time, and unable to see to her baby, which had been given in charge to another person, and her horror upon arriving at the place of safety, to which she, with the other women and the children, had been conveyed, and finding that her child had been forgotten, was too great to be described. The English army was in retreat then, and she knew that the fort, which had just been evacuated, was to be blown up to prevent its falling into the enemy's hands. A party of engineers had stayed behind for that purpose, and that her child would perish in the explosion she never doubted. She could not tell calmly, even now, of the fears and agonies of those long hours; how, unable to rest where they had laid her, she wandered up and down, not asking for her baby, for she never hoped to see it again, but scanning

every face to find one that had come from the place where it had been left, that she might hear something, even if it were only to know that all was over. She told, too, how all day long she had listened to the firing in the distance, until, when evening closed, it ceased at length; and parties came trooping in, and amongst them some engineers.

'I watched them come in, and I saw them standing round a watch-fire, Miss Lisa, and for a long time I stood and looked at them, stupid-like, for I seemed as if I could neither speak nor move. But after a bit, I saw there was one of them, an officer, who kept looking round, and who had something in his arms; he was covered with blood and black with powder, and his face looked ghastly in the fire-light—but I heard them say that it was him that had had the blowing-up of the fort; and I can't tell why it was, but something like hope seemed to come back to me then, and I went up to him. Ah, Miss Lisa, I don't know how it all happened now; I don't know how I got my baby; but it was him he had—my little Ted—not hurt, not a scratch about him, and fast asleep in his arms, as if he had been in mine. I just went down on my knees to thank him, but I couldn't. I looked at him, but I couldn't say one word, and he didn't wait to hear me—he gave him back to me, and then he was off before I could speak. But they told me all afterwards; how when the train was laid, and he—Lieutenant Tennent, that's what he was

then—when he had lighted the match with his own hand, and had stayed behind after he sent the others off, to make sure it was burning, he heard a child cry, and at the risk of his own life ran back and found my Ted and brought him off. He was only just in time—he was thrown down by the explosion and stunned for some minutes, but he had got my child and he kept him fast—and he carried him through all that hard fighting that day and gave him back to me at night, when I thought I had lost him for ever. I shall never forget it, Miss Lisa. I would go through fire and water for him, I would; and my husband would have done the same.' Mrs. Daly's voice was very husky as she spoke.

'It was very brave of him,' said Lisa; her eye kindling and her colour deepening while she listened.

'Brave—yes—there wasn't a braver in all the army than he was; and he was good, too, Miss Lisa, and kind. Everybody said the same of him; he was always the one to do a kindness, or help anybody who wanted it. And I'm sure he was kind to me—the best friend I ever had. He took a great fancy to Ted after that day—he was always fond of children, you know, miss—and he never met me afterwards without coming to ask after him. I used to see him often; and when my husband died at last out there, and I was in such distress, wasn't he kind to me? He paid my passage home, and as I'd hardly a friend left in England, and none to go to, he

told me to come down here, and wrote to Miss Mary about me. I'm getting on well now, and my boys are growing up nicely; they'll be big fellows soon, and they're a comfort to me—Ted in particular; and I don't forget that if it hadn't been for the Captain, I shouldn't have had him now.'

Here Mary's entrance put a stop to Mrs. Daly's communications; and Lisa, though she would have liked to ask a hundred other questions, was obliged to restrain her curiosity and return once more to her own meditations. No sooner, however, did she find herself alone shortly afterwards with her cousin, than she began, eagerly:

'Mary, I should like very much to ask you something.'

There was a smile from Mary at the abrupt way in which this was said.

'It's about Percy,' she went on. 'I've been hearing of him from Mrs. Daly just now—about Ted, you know. Mary, it was very brave of him, wasn't it? And I do like to hear of brave things.' Her eyes were sparkling again. 'I always did; and I had never heard of this before.'

'Hadn't you? Well, you have had a full account of it now, I am quite sure,' was the answer, with a half-laugh.

'Not a bit more than it deserved, and than I liked to hear. I should like to have heard a great deal more,

indeed, only you came in and prevented me. But, Mary, what I was wanting to ask you was about that terrible cut that he has on his forehead. Do you mind telling me how he got it? From a sabre, he said it was; but how was it done? In fighting, too?'

'Yes, dear, in the same war, but later, at the siege of Mooltan.'

'Well?' Lisa was looking at her impatiently, finding she did not go on. 'Why don't you tell me, Mary? You don't mind my knowing about it, do you? I fancied, do you know, from what you said this afternoon that—'

'That he has reason to be proud of it, and so he has.' And Mary smiled a little. 'He was defending a brother officer who had been badly wounded, from a party of Sikhs, when he was cut down himself. Fortunately some of his own soldiers came up at the time, or they would both have been killed. Percy was supposed to be dead when they carried him off, and for weeks afterwards no one thought he would recover.'

Lisa was silent. She fancied from her cousin's manner that she had not heard all yet, that there was something more to be told; and she was right, for after a pause Mary said with some hesitation,

'It was Captain Carleton whom he saved, and—'

'Captain Carleton, that friend of his that you told me about the other day?'

'Yes, dear, but they were not friends then; quite the contrary. Captain Carleton had done him a great

wrong, and for months before that day at Mooltan they had never spoken to each other, except when absolutely obliged. There were faults on both sides I believe, as there generally are in such cases; at least Percy has said since, that things need not have gone so far, if he had not been too proud to explain circumstances in which he was misjudged. But the chief fault lay with Captain Carleton—he owned it himself afterwards. He was angry, and listened to misrepresentations; and he did Percy great injury in more ways than one. He was his senior too by three or four years, and captain of his company; so that it was in his power to annoy him exceedingly at times, and he did. We never knew at the time how much Percy suffered through him, and I don't suppose we ever should have known it, if it had not been for Captain Carleton himself. He got well long before Percy did, and he was very grateful to him. He did everything he could for him while he was ill, and used to write to us constantly to tell us how he was going on, and in one of his letters he told us all that had happened. Such a noble letter it was, and he spoke of Percy—well, never mind what he said, but I know that I was proud of my brother. I had a right to be, for it was not everyone, no, nor one in a thousand, who would have done what he did.' Mary's eyes were glistening as she spoke.

'And that was what made them friends?' said Lisa thoughtfully, after a long pause.

'Yes, they were fast friends after that—like brothers indeed. I am sure when he died two or three years ago, Percy felt his death quite as much as if he had really been his brother. It was a fever of some sort that he had, and hardly anyone else would go near him, because it was supposed to be infectious; but Percy nursed him day and night through it all, and was with him when he died. He was dreadfully cut up for months afterwards, and I don't think he has got over it even now, for he never seems to like to hear his name mentioned. But that is just like him, though nobody believes it of him in general. He is cold and reserved in manner, and very few people know how warm-hearted he really is. He would give up everything and do everything, I am sure, for those he cares for; though, as far as that goes, he will do what he can for anyone,' she added with a smile. 'No one can be kinder than he is, or think less of giving themselves trouble for others.' And Mary, who, like many another sister, could grow eloquent in talking of her brother, went on to tell of many instances of his unselfishness, and care and thoughtfulness for those whose weakness or danger had claimed his assistance.

Lisa listened to it all, but she said very little in answer. She was unusually silent indeed, not only just then, but all that evening; and when Mary was called away after a time, she lay still in the dusk, looking up into the lime-trees above her window, and

out into the darkening sky beyond, apparently too much taken up with her own thoughts to care to turn to any other occupation. What these thoughts were exactly, she would have found it hard to tell, and she made no attempt to analyse them. There was only one thing of which she was quite conscious, and that was, a feeling of self-reproach for the great injustice she had done her cousin by her foolish prejudice. She was ashamed to think how often she had ridiculed him for his plain looks and short-sightedness; how often too, she had laughed at him for the very thing for which she ought most to have honoured him. For that scar which she considered such a disfigurement, and which had provoked her thoughtless wit into bestowing on him a nickname, had been gained in saving the life of one who had wronged him, and was, in truth, the noblest decoration he could have worn. She hated herself now, for having ever despised and disliked him, and once more felt, as she so often did, how gladly she would have recalled the past. 'I wish I had never been so foolish, so wicked,' she said to herself. 'Yes, for it was wicked to dislike him for what he couldn't help: one thing indeed he wouldn't wish to help even if he could, and I'm sure I shouldn't wish it for him now that I know how he got it. If I had only known before—how sorry I am that I didn't!—I never would have laughed at him as I have done, for that, or for being so blind either. I wonder whether he ever guessed what I was thinking

of, or ever heard me say anything about him. Oh, I hope not! I should be so sorry now to think that he had ever known it. But I don't think he did: he wouldn't have been so kind to me surely, if he had seen or thought that I didn't like him. I do like him now though, and not a little, but very much, though he is so plain. I am not sure indeed that he is so very plain after all. He didn't look so this afternoon, at any rate. When he smiled he was rather like Mary, much more than he generally is; for a minute or two I think he was quite good-looking; and if he were not so grave, I really fancy he would be so always. I don't know why he shouldn't be, for he hasn't such very bad features; I've seen people with much worse. It's only because he has such black hair and is so dark, and looks so old, and has—and is— Oh dear, how silly I am! What does it matter after all what his looks are, if I like him, which I do most certainly, and very odd it is that I should, for I never meant to do so.'

Her cogitations were brought to an end by the entrance of a servant with lights, and then Elinor came to sit with her; but when she went to bed and fell asleep that night, her thoughts returned to her cousin Percy, and in her dreams she saw him on the battle-field, with a little child in his arms, fighting his way through drawn swords and the flash of musketry; and then, trembling with fear, she seemed to stand by his side, while he kept at bay the fierce-looking soldiers who were crowding round them, and who pressed hard on

some prostrate figure, whose half-hidden face was strangely like Arthur's. With which medley of thoughts, her sleep became a sound one and dreams terminated.

It was with very different feelings, however, from those with which she had hitherto regarded him that she met her cousin the next day; so different were they, indeed, that she almost expected to see some change in him likewise, and was half disappointed to find him looking just as he always did, and with nothing about him of the hero into which her imagination had exalted him. No, he was only her plain and silent cousin Percy; just as plain and silent as she had always known him, and evidently far enough from suspecting the deep interest, almost reverence, with which she now looked upon him. But, in spite of the momentary disappointment that she experienced at this, her feelings towards him had changed too completely for her ever again, either in thought or word, to depreciate him as she had once done. Grave and reserved he might be still, and with no good looks to please those who cared only for personal advantages; but never again could she think slightingly of him who had perilled his life for one who had wronged him, and who had braved danger and death itself to carry a little child back to its mother. In her eyes from that day he was a hero—and a hero all the more from his very unconsciousness of having done anything to awaken within her such ardent feelings of interest and admiration.

CHAPTER IX.

IS HE SO VERY PLAIN?

'ISABEL comes back this day fortnight,' remarked Elinor one afternoon a week or two later; 'Mamma has just heard from her. They will be in England on Friday week, and then they go to Gainsford for a few days, and come down here afterwards. I am very glad, for I shall get off some of these disagreeable calls when she is at home again. I do dislike them so very much, and it's so hot to-day!'

'So it is.' And Lisa raised her head from the drawing over which she was bending, and pushed back her hair from her face. 'Is Isabel really coming back so soon though?' she asked after a little pause.

'Yes; why not? I don't call it very soon either, for I am sure she has been away long enough—in October they went—didn't they? And she has been wanting to get back ever since Percy came home; I don't know how she has stayed away so long. But she is quite well again now, she says, and Janet is tired of Italy; so they mean to leave the Parkers to finish their tour alone, and get back as soon as they can. Mr. Thorpe

—Cunninghame Thorpe, you know—goes to fetch them.'

'Mr. Thorpe! I don't know anything about him,' was Lisa's answer, in rather an absent tone. She was becoming absorbed in her drawing again.

'Don't know anything about him! Oh, no, I forgot; you have never been to Gainsford. Well, you will have the pleasure of seeing him the week after next, for he is coming down with Janet and Isabel, and I dare say he will stay here for a day or two, before he goes on to his uncle at the Moat.'

'His uncle?'

'Yes, his uncle. My dear Lisa, how can you be so stupid! You can't pretend not to know that old Sir Richard Thorpe is Janet's uncle; and of course he must be her brother's too. What are you thinking of to be so silly?'

'I don't know. I am sure I had forgotten that Janet had anything to do with the Moat; if, indeed, I ever knew it. But I don't believe I did. I never thought about it at any rate.'

'Very likely not,' said Elinor, smiling a little; 'I don't believe you ever do think of things, Lisa, like other people. But you ought to have known that, because Janet went over there several times when she was here last, and she was always talking of her grumpy old uncle. Oh dear, here's a button off my glove! I wonder where Mary is, to sew it on again—she

has always a needle ready, and my work-box is downstairs. Old Sir Richard is as deaf as a post, and very disagreeable. Janet only used to go and see him as a matter of duty. He is very rich, and will leave her some money, I believe; and Cunninghame Thorpe will have that place when he dies, and the baronetcy too. His father was Sir Richard's younger brother, you know.'

'No, I didn't know it.' Cunninghame Thorpe was nothing to Lisa, and if she could only have made that little bit of drawing, at which she had been working for an hour, look quite right, he might have had all the baronetcies in England for any objection she would have made to the arrangement.

'He is not at all like Janet,' Elinor went on after she had given a long yawn, and looked for some time first at her glove, and then all round the room, as if she expected to see a needle and thread walking towards her. 'He is very handsome—has the most splendid blue eyes you ever saw, and such a moustache! I don't know how long he stays at the Moat, but I suppose we shall see a good deal of him while he is there, for he won't care to shut himself up with his uncle, I am quite sure. He will be an acquisition, I expect, for he certainly can make himself very agreeable, though Isabel does say she can't bear him, and Arthur— Oh, that reminds me that Arthur is not coming here at present. He's going to Gainsford instead.'

'Going to Gainsford! How tiresome! He always

comes here in the vacations. But that's Ralph's doing of course. How provoking of him!'

'Very. But he won't stay very long, only till Ralph can get away himself; and then they both come here. They won't be more than a fortnight after Janet, I expect. Ah, there's Mamma calling me. I suppose she's ready. And here's Percy too, coming to look after your drawing. I wish I were you, Lisa, to stay at home and lie on the sofa.' And Elinor sauntered off, wondering how the button was to get on her glove before she went out.

'I am not so fond of lying here,' Lisa remarked as the door closed; 'I'm tired enough of it just now. And oh, Captain Tennent, do come and look at this thing, and tell me where it's wrong. You say sometimes that I have a talent for drawing, but I haven't to-day, that's quite certain—this is horrid, and I can't get it right.'

She threw down her pencil a little pettishly, but her face brightened again as he sat down beside her and began to point out and make the necessary corrections. 'I was hot and cross,' she said then apologetically, 'but it's not so bad after all, I see. I want to draw well,' she added after a pause; 'I think if I can do that, and play well too, I shall get more money.'

'Get more money?'

'Yes, when I have to teach, I mean. People always get more money when they can teach a great many things, don't they? And I am to be a governess some day, you know.'

'No, I did not know it.' There was something in his tone which made Lisa look at him.

'Yes,' she said, a little puzzled. 'Is it very odd? You think I shan't be able to teach perhaps? But in two or three years I shall have learnt a good deal more. And this isn't my home,' she added after a pause; 'I have none of my own, and I can't live here always of course.'

'Why not? What is there to prevent it?' he said hastily—almost angrily it seemed to her.

'I don't know; but—what have I said? Have I vexed you?'

'Vexed me?' and he smiled. 'No; what could make you fancy such a thing? Did I speak so sharply? I beg your pardon if I did, but I was thinking of something else, I believe. What did you say though? What reason did you give for not being able to stay here?'

'I didn't give any, but you may give me one if you like, why I should,' said Lisa with a half laugh.

'Well, for the same reason that you are here now. You have no home of your own, and therefore have a right to look to us, as your nearest relations, to give you one: that is reason enough in all conscience, isn't it?'

'I don't know. Aunt Helen don't think so at any rate—and I'm sure I don't—at least I mean—' she hesitated—'I can't help myself now; but I would rather not stay by-and-by.'

'You would not? And why not, may I ask?' And then, as he caught sight of her crimson face, 'My dear

Lisa, you can't suppose that anybody here grudges you house-room.'

'My dear Lisa.' The tears were in her eyes at the words, and the tone in which they were said, but she made an attempt to laugh. 'No, I suppose not; I'm not very big, and I don't take up much room anywhere. But there are other things to be considered besides that, and—oh, you must have seen it, Aunt Helen don't care for me—she never has—she would like me to go, and she has always said I must. I would rather go myself. I don't wish to stay where I know I am not wanted.'

Percy was silent for some minutes, and when he spoke again his voice was changed: 'And you don't mind the idea of a governess's life?' he said then.

'Mind it? No, why should I? I think I shall like it. I shall like working and earning my own money and being—'

'Independent.'

'Yes, and being independent. It isn't wrong to like that, is it? The only thing is that I don't know exactly what governesses do, and I am afraid I shouldn't know how to set about teaching; I should make such lots of mistakes. But I suppose I should learn in time, and I should only begin with quite little children at first. I shouldn't mind how little they were; I should like them about four or five, and then I could play with them and make them very happy. Oh, it would be great fun, I think, and I am

so fond of children; I have some dear little things at the Sunday-school, you know; they don't learn much, to be sure; most of them don't do much but tumble off the forms, and then I pick them up again—but still I teach them a little, so I suppose I could teach others too.'

There was no answer—he was absorbed apparently in cutting a pencil to a very sharp point: 'And so you will not mind leaving the Priory?' he said after some moments' silence; 'you wish to go indeed, and will be glad to get away?'

'Glad! What, to leave Mary and Uncle Henry, who have been so kind to me! If you knew what I feel when I think of leaving them, you wouldn't say I was glad to go'—there was something of reproach in her tone. 'They have been so good to me—so very kind and good, and when people are kind to me, I can never forget it. It will make me miserable to leave them; but what can I do? I must go; there is no help for it. I don't want it to be helped indeed. I would rather work for myself than stay here with Aunt Helen, even to be with Mary; but I wish—oh, I do wish I had a home of my own; a home where I could feel I had a right to be, and where I could have a mother to help me and keep me always with her. Sometimes at night I fancy that I have; I dream that I am back again in my old home, and I can see it all quite plain, though it's [illegible]ars ago since I was there. I don't know what I do [illegible]tly, but I am very happy; and then I wake and

it's all gone; and I remember that I have no home and no father, and no mother, and that by-and-by I must go away from here too—must leave Mary and go to live with people who will know nothing about me, and perhaps will never care for me. I don't like to think of it, and sometimes I feel very lonely and miserable; only that's not of much use, so I try to think of the bright side—of the little children, and of earning my own money—and I fancy that I'll try and be happy after all. I shall like to have some money of my own—there are so many things I want to do. How much do you think I shall get? But you don't know anything about governesses, do you?'

Percy did know quite enough about them to make him hope most fervently that it might never really be his cousin's lot to learn anything of their life from personal experience; but he did not say so, and only answered rather shortly, 'that he had not seen much of them.' He was in one of what Lisa called 'his dreadfully grave moods,' about which she had lately begun to rally him; and most probably she would have done so now, had she not been too much taken up with her own reflections to notice his preoccupation.

'I wonder whether governesses are ever allowed to have dogs,' she said after some minutes' meditation, and in a tone which seemed to imply that the consideration was of great moment. 'I should be very sorry to have to give up Prince and leave him here. I wonder

whether I must, or whether I may take him with me. I wish I might; I should like to have something belonging to the Priory with me, when I am living all alone among strange people; something too that would help me to remember this time in particular; not, though, that I am ever likely to forget it,' she said, looking at him with a smile; 'I shall always think of it, and how pleasant you have made it for me.'

'I?' and Percy almost started; 'you must think a great deal of a very little, Lisa, if you can make that out,' he said hastily.

'Must I? I don't know what you call a very little then. Perhaps, though, it may seem so to you. You have seen and done so much, that very likely you may think nothing of things that seem very great to me—that make up my life almost. But I know that your being here has made all the difference in the world to me lately, so I can't think you have done very little for me. These last five weeks would have been so long if it hadn't been for you. I have been cross and impatient enough at times as it is, but I should have found it a great deal harder, if you had not been so kind, and done so many little things to give me pleasure—yes, little things to you and great to me. I shall never forget them.'

'I am sure of that,' said Percy, smiling; 'there is no fear of your forgetting to be grateful. Pray do you mean to go through life thinking so much of common civilities?'

'Yes, if you call what you have done for me common civilities. You don't mind my being grateful for them, do you? I can't help it. I shall always remember them even if you go away, and I don't see you again for years. But I wish you never were going. I shall be so sorry when you do. I should like you to stay here always,' she added, in her childish, eager way.

He did not smile then; his face was very grave.

'Thank you,' he said quietly, and without raising his eyes. 'But I think, Lisa, you would hardly wish to condemn me always to the idle life I am leading now. I have no desire at present to give up my profession.' He seemed about to say something else, but paused rather abruptly, and, laying down his pencil, he took a turn across the room. 'You are going out this evening,' he said at length, coming back to her side. 'I have asked for the carriage, and we are going to Delse Common, you know.'

'Yes, for one of my last drives. How very pleasant they have been! I shall be almost sorry to give them up, though I do like walking so much better. And to-morrow I am to begin and use my foot again. I am going to borrow your stick and hop about the garden at first, and then, in a week or two I dare say I shall be able to walk as well as anybody. But if I have to give up my drives, I needn't give up other things, need I? You will let me go on with my reading and drawing just as I have been doing, won't you?

You won't leave me to myself again? I shouldn't like to lose all my pleasures at once.'

All her pleasures! To those who had known Lisa only as she was a few weeks back, it would have sounded strange to hear her talking of such quiet occupations as pleasures. But those weeks, few as they were, had worked a change in her, and, although she had in no wise lost her love for active employment, she was beginning to acquire a liking also for many things which once she had almost despised. It might be that a time of enforced rest had obliged her to be content with amusements naturally foreign to her taste; but more powerful reasons still were to be found in the alteration of her feelings towards her cousin. For altered they were; there was no doubt of that. Sure as she had formerly been that she never could like him, firmly resolved, indeed, as she had been that she never would, quite as certain was it now that she did like him, and liked him as she had never liked anyone before. It was true that she had never defined this present state of her feelings—that she seldom asked herself what she thought of him, or whether she cared for him at all. She only knew that it was a great happiness to be with him; that she was always looking for his coming, and always sorry when he went; that the wish to please him was the one always now uppermost in her mind; and that his opinion and approval of what she did, had far more weight with her than that of anyone else.

In the past month, too, she had learned to know him well, for when the barrier which her own foolishness had raised between them was once broken down, there had been but little to prevent a speedy mutual acquaintance. She had no idea of reserve with a person whom she liked and trusted; and although there was plenty of it on his side to begin with, it was not long in giving way before the winning grace and frankness with which, when she discovered the injustice she had done him, she tried to make amends for her former coldness; and they soon became fast friends. It was very rarely, and to but few people, that he cared to show himself as he really was; and why he should do so now, why he should choose to come out as he often did to her, a mere girl, a child in fact, was more than she could tell, though she did not much concern herself with his reasons for doing so. It was quite enough for her that he did, that he liked to give her his confidence, and that he would speak to her of things of which he seldom spoke to others, while no attraction was greater at any time than that of hearing him talk, as he often did, of things they saw and read, or met with in their many excursions. It mattered little what it was, he made everything interesting to her; though, woman-like, her chief delight, perhaps, was to hear of what more nearly regarded himself; of what he had seen and done in other countries, of adventures by sea and land in which he had borne his part, of daring deeds done in the field,

and of perils and hardships gone through. She was fascinated then by the earnestness with which he spoke, and by the vividness and eloquence of his descriptions, and in the pleasure of listening, she had soon learned to forget all the prejudices which she had once entertained against the speaker. At such times, indeed, he was no longer plain and reserved; and the Percy Tennent who sat talking to her in the twilight of those long evenings of early summer, or when they were driving through the shady lanes or over the pleasant sunny heaths far away in the country where he often took her, was not at all the Percy Tennent whom she had first known or as he appeared to people in general. The sombre expression, habitual to his face, would give way then to one of so much animation and brightness, and his dark eye would light up with so much of enthusiasm and brilliancy, that, if not absolutely handsome, no one would have dreamed of calling him plain. Lisa certainly did not, and the absorbing pleasure with which she listened at these moments was all the greater because what he said was spoken so naturally and unaffectedly, and he seemed to think so little of the feats of danger and heroism which he described, taking them apparently as matters of course, and what any one, if called upon, would do from a sense of honour and duty. Her keenest admiration for all that was brave and chivalrous was roused by these conversations, and the interest in her cousin which had first been awakened by what she

heard from Mary grew stronger every day. Everything also that belonged to him, or that he cared for, was vested with interest likewise for her; the books that he liked, and wished her to read and like too, were pored over with delight, she studied the history of places where he had been, and found no occupation wearisome if he suggested or took part in it, and it was curious to see how patiently she would sit, trying to master things which formerly she would have flung away in disgust if she had failed to conquer their difficulties at once. It seemed as if in those few weeks her whole nature had, in some respects, completely changed; nor was it only in manner that the change might have been remarked, her face too had altered in its expression. There was far more of repose and quietness about it than before, and the half-defiant look which the feeling of standing constantly on the defensive against harshness and injustice had often called forth, was seldom seen there now, for her cousin's presence gave her a sense of protection which all Mary's care and affection had never been able to accomplish, and when he was by, she no longer lived as she had done, in the fear of provoking her aunt's displeasure. Mrs. Tennent, indeed, had of late become singularly indifferent to her proceedings, and she was quite aware that Percy had a great deal to do with this. No one but he could have planned and carried out half the pleasures which she had lately had, or procured her so many indulgences; and with the

feeling of security which his presence gave her, Lisa's hitherto wild and unsubdued nature had begun to soften strangely, and the reckless, daring wilfulness, which had so often characterised her in former days, seemed now to be fast passing away.

CHAPTER X.

'STANDING—WHERE THE BROOK AND RIVER MEET.'

'CAPTAIN TENNENT, what are you doing? May I come in and stay a little, or shall I disturb you?'

Lisa was standing at the open window of the library, looking in with the prettily shy glance in her eyes which always made Percy think of her in connection with some wild fawn. 'I won't talk; may I stay a little?' she repeated wistfully.

'You may stay as long as you like, Miss Kennedy. I am only working for amusement; it won't hurt me to be interrupted.'

'Miss Kennedy! What is that for?' she said, coming across the room and looking rather puzzled.

Percy smiled a little. 'As you are come to stay, you had better sit down.' And he placed a chair for her at the table and pushed away some of the papers which lay about. 'You have been walking, haven't you?'

'No, only a little in the garden, and I like standing better. I am not resting on my foot, you see; I have a stick. But why did you call me Miss Kennedy? Have I done anything?'

'Nothing at all; if by doing anything, you mean, have you offended me? No; I was only trying how it sounded. You always call me Captain Tennent, and I was thinking that, of course, I ought to be equally ceremonious with you. I don't know, indeed, why I am not. I think for the future I will try and be so. I will forget that you have any Christian name, in the same way that you ignore mine.'

'I am sure I hope you won't. I don't like being Miss Kennedy at all. And you always have called me Lisa; why shouldn't you go on doing so? Why should you alter now? I thought cousins always called each other by their Christian names.'

'So I thought,' he answered rather drily; 'but, as you seem to forget I have one, I supposed your ideas on the subject were different.'

'You mean that you would like me to call you Percy. And so I do, when I am speaking of you to anybody else, but—'

'But what? Why shouldn't you when you are speaking to me as well? I am your cousin as much as you are mine, I believe.'

'Of course; only—think what a difference there is between us,' in a tone of great respect.

'A difference?'

'Yes; in age I mean. I am only a child, and you—oh, you are ever so much older and wiser and better than I am. I don't think I could ever call you Percy when I was talking to you.'

'I am sorry to hear it. And pray, how much older do you think I am than yourself? What age do you set me down for, as you seem to consider me so very ancient?'

'I don't know. You are older than Mary, I believe, and she was twenty-nine on her last birthday. She told me so: but she has never told me how old you are: only you look—'

'Of venerable date, do I? And yet I am not so very old either. I shall be thirty-one in July.'

'Thirty-one!'

'Yes, thirty-one. Does that sound very old to you?'

'Very,' emphatically; and then afraid from the look on his face that she had said something wrong—'at least, well, I fancy now that I should feel rather old if I were that age, but perhaps I may not when I come to it. Do you really mean, though, that you are as old as that?' she added, with a curiously wistful expression of countenance.

'Yes, I do.' And then, as she made no answer—'Why? Do you think the distance between us so very formidable, now that you know what it is? Will it make any difference in—in—' He stopped suddenly.

'In what?' Lisa asked in some surprise. 'But no—why should it make any difference in any way? I always knew you were a great deal older than I was, though I didn't know you were so old as that. I might, to be sure, if I had thought about it, because you

look so much older than Mary, and I knew her age. But I don't believe I ever gave it a thought. It has always seemed natural for you to look as you do; I don't think, indeed, that I should like you to be any younger: I shouldn't respect you, perhaps, half so much if you were.'

'Respect!' muttered Percy, in a scarcely audible tone.

'Yes, respect, of course,' said Lisa, smiling. 'How oddly you say it, as if you thought it very strange that I should respect you. But I always respect people that I look up to in any way, and of course I look up to you. You are so far away from me in everything; how can I help it? The strange thing would be if I didn't, wouldn't it?'

'I suppose it would,' he said, rather absently. He was sitting with his head resting on his hand, tracing figures thoughtfully on a piece of paper on which before he had been making calculations, and Lisa stood for a moment or two looking over his shoulder without speaking. Short answers on his part were of too frequent occurrence at all times for her to notice anything remarkable now, either in that or in his manner, which had a good deal of his old constraint in it. She was thinking of something else, indeed; her attention being directed to the books and papers he had gathered round him.

'How tired you must get of this kind of work!' she

remarked, after a pause. 'What is it you are doing? And what is that thing there? I often see you using it; what is it for?'

'That thing?' and he roused himself at the question. '"That thing" is a sextant. Have you never looked at it before?'

He took it up to show it to her and to explain its use, while she listened with great interest, and, forgetting altogether that she had come with the intention of not talking, she went on to ask question after question, not only about that, but all sorts of other things connected with mathematics, fortification, geometry, &c.; until Percy, in some amusement, asked her if she had any intention of taking up such studies.

'Oh, no; they wouldn't be of much use to me, would they? At any rate I had better learn some other things perfectly first. But I like to know what you are doing; that was why I was asking. I always like to know about things that you care for, even when they are dry; and these are *very* dry,' she added, making a face expressive of much disgust; 'I don't think I should care to study them at all, though I do like to hear about them in this way, because you make them interesting.'

Percy smiled a little as he said he thought they were not in her line; he had noticed that she was not much given to working her way through difficulties. Like many others of her sex, she preferred jumping to conclusions to finding out her reasons for arriving at them,

and he doubted whether she would ever have patience to solve a problem.

Lisa laughed: 'I don't suppose I should. I am not fond at any time of being obliged to give reasons for a thing. To feel is quite enough for me. I dare say it's not right, and of course you are much wiser—men always are. They are ever so much wiser than women, I know; and I suppose they never set about anything without having the best reasons for doing it, and knowing, too, exactly what their reasons are; and I dare say it's very right and proper that they should. I know, indeed, that one ought to have good reasons for everything, and be able to reason correctly, but still I'm very glad that women are not always obliged to do it. I think when people are always reasoning it makes them so cold and calculating; and sometimes they seem to me to reason about things that they ought not, and that brings doubts. There are some things I shouldn't like to doubt,' she added quickly.

Percy looked at her for a moment, and then he said, quietly: 'You are right there, Lisa; there are some things which no one would ever wish to doubt; and yet,' after a pause, 'those are the very things which few men, perhaps, pass through life without being tempted, at one time or another, to doubt. Not women so much, happily; they live at home in general, and it depends upon themselves in great measure how much

they know of all the evil that goes on in the world. But a man in his business or profession is different; he is often brought face to face with things that raise doubts of all he would most wish to have faith in. And what is to be done then? I am not so sure,' he added, looking at her with a smile, 'that reasoning in such a case is so very bad after all. If a man is able to reason his way through doubts, it may be just as well perhaps for him that he had not only his feeling to trust to: don't you think so?'

Lisa smiled too. 'Perhaps so. I dare say you are right. I dare say, too,' with her eyes fixed earnestly upon him as she spoke; 'I dare say that a person who has felt as you say—who has had those doubts, and yet has worked his way through them—is very good, better than other people—better even than those who have never had any doubts at all, because he has thought more and has had more to try him; but — I don't think he can always be the happiest, and I'm glad that I am a woman, and may think and feel without being obliged to give reasons for everything. And I am glad that women are not like men, but can stay at home, and not know anything of those bad things that make people doubt and feel miserable.'

'And a good thing for us that you can,' said Percy. 'If we had not women to keep up our trust in what is good, we should have no faith in anything sometimes, I think.'

'If you hadn't good women, I suppose you mean. For there are bad women as well as good, are there not? And some very bad indeed. I heard somebody say once that when women are really bad, they are worse than the worst of men, but I can't believe that. I don't see how it can be.'

Percy smiled a little.

'"For men, at most, differ as heaven and earth:
But women, worst and best, as heaven and hell.'

You know that, Lisa, don't you? and I'm afraid it's true. When a woman once really gives herself up to what is bad, she often goes farther in wickedness than any man: perhaps, for want of that very reasoning which you despise, and which prevents her foreseeing all the consequences of her actions; and perhaps because she has, in general, so many more natural restraints and safeguards about her than a man, that when she throws these away, she feels it is her own fault: and then she becomes reckless, and cares but little what she does. She has made her own temptations, and these we make for ourselves are always worse than any that come to us in other ways.'

Lisa pondered for some minutes. 'Do you think that is the reason?' she said at length. 'I suppose it is: and yet, do you know, I am always so sorry for people who are bad: a great many of the [illegible] instance, who [illegible]

of them have never been taught and don't know any better. It makes me miserable to think how unhappy they must be, and I can't bear to hear them found fault with, as if they could help being bad just as much as we can who know what is right. There is a woman who lives at the end of this street; we see her sometimes when we go by; she is very wicked indeed;' Lisa lowered her voice almost to a whisper; 'she gets tipsy very often, and she has done other very bad things, I don't know what exactly, but once she was put in prison. A great many people won't speak to her because she is so bad; but I always feel so sorry for her. I can't help it; for I think if I had had such a wretched home as she has, and had never been taught any better, I should have been just as bad as she is; and one day when we were going past I gave her some flowers—she was so pleased. For a minute she looked quite nice, and I thought if she had had some one to care for her, very likely she would have been as good as anybody. Why shouldn't she, indeed? She is just the same really as we are; only instead of being happy and cared for when she was young, most likely she had no one to teach her what was right, and so she went all wrong. Oh, I'm so very sorry for her, and for all the other poor people like her, and I often wish I could do something for them, but I don't know how. Perhaps I shall when I am older—perhaps I shall be able to help some of them then the same as Mary does. I hope so.'

Percy was silent. He had been watching Lisa's face while she was speaking, and his eyes were still fixed upon her when she stood for some minutes afterwards, evidently lost in thought. But she looked up at last, and then, as she met his gaze, her countenance changed again from its unusually thoughtful expression, and she broke into a little laugh, glancing at the same time at his papers. 'How fast your calculations are getting on, and how much you must wish me out of the way! And really I didn't mean to talk when I came in. I don't know how it was I began, except that I always do talk when I am with you. I think Captain Tennent—' She stopped suddenly with a smile and a little blush. 'Well, Percy, then, if you wish it, but it sounds very odd. Do you really mean that you will like it best?'

'I do, Lisa; nothing would give me greater pleasure,' he said earnestly; adding more lightly, 'Perhaps you would be more inclined then to forget the terrible difference in our ages.'

'And you wish me to forget that?' Lisa said, wonderingly.

'Of course I do,' in the same light tone. 'You don't think that I care to be an object of respect only. If you look upon me as so very old, you will be fancying that I have lost all interest in what young people care for, and that I cannot understand your feelings and pleasures: and I should be very sorry for you to think such a thing as that; nor would it be true.'

'No, indeed, that it would not,' Lisa exclaimed. 'But I never should think it, for I shall always remember all the things that you have done and thought of for me. And if it will give you any pleasure for me to call you Percy, I'm sure I will. I'll begin from this time, and you shall see how well I can remember when I like; you shall never hear Captain Tennent again; I didn't know before that you disliked it so much: you should have told me so sooner, and then I would have left it off: you might have been quite certain that I would do anything you liked.'

'Anything, Lisa!'

'Yes, anything, everything,' she said, eagerly. 'Is there anything more now that you want me to do: I will. Tell me what it is; tell me quick, and I'll do it directly; now, this minute.' She looked at him all expectation.

But he only smiled.

'Thank you, thank you very much, but there is nothing now that I want,' and then rising from his seat as the luncheon bell began to ring: 'I was only thinking that your promise was rather unlimited; and I might, perhaps, ask for impossibilities.'

'That is not very likely. But, of course, if it were impossible, I couldn't do it. I only meant that if I could, I would. Anything I can do, I will—you may be quite, quite certain of that.'

'Ah, that is a much safer promise. Well, some day perhaps, Lisa, I may remind you of it.'

'I hope you will,' she said, still looking all eagerness; 'and Percy—' She stopped, somewhat to his disappointment, for never before had her voice sounded sweeter, and never had he heard his own name with greater pleasure. She looked at him for a moment very shyly.

'You are sure you like it? Really and truly? Well then, Percy, what I was going to say was this—that I hope you will let me go on doing the little things for you that I have been doing lately, mending your gloves, and looking for what you want, and all those kind of things. I like to do them, and I was afraid that, now Isabel is coming, you would forget to ask me. She will be wanting to do everything for you, you know, and then perhaps you won't think of me any longer. I shouldn't like that.' And the colour came into her face.

'No more should I, Lisa: but it is impossible, quite impossible,' he said, hastily; 'Isabel's coming will make no difference to me as far as you are concerned. You are—you must be—' He paused abruptly, and then, seeing her eyes fixed upon him in some astonishment, he added, with a change of tone, 'I should like you to know her well. From what you have told me I don't think you do yet, and I am sorry for it. You must see now if you can't learn to understand each other, to please me.'

Lisa smiled. 'So I will; at least I'll try. It seems

odd, certainly, that I don't—don't like her; yes, for that's the truth: I don't like her, though it sounds strange to say so, as she is your sister, and I know you are so very fond of her. I know she is very good, too, and all that kind of thing; but somehow, she is not at all like Mary, and she often makes me very angry. Perhaps it is my own fault; I dare say I am silly. She used to tell me of all sorts of wrong things that I did, and I didn't like that, and then we quarrelled; no, not quarrelled exactly, for she was too old for that, and too good; she never gets angry, you know; but I do, very angry indeed, sometimes; and when she said those things that I didn't like, I used to get angry and be very rude to her. And sometimes aunt Helen heard me, and then she would box my ears and send me to stay in my own room all day. That didn't make me like Isabel any better,' Lisa added, with a laugh and mischievous sparkle in her eye. 'And I don't think I was very polite to her when I came out again. I used to be ten times more angry than before, and didn't care what I did so that I could provoke her. I should have done a great deal more, too, if Mary hadn't been always getting hold of me and talking to me, and then I was obliged to do as she asked me. I never could go against Mary. I couldn't bear to see her look miserable, as she did sometimes when I had been very bad; and once she actually made me beg Isabel's pardon. I wouldn't have done it for any one else, for I had been

shut up for three days, and I believe I should have stayed there till now if Mary hadn't come back—she had been away somewhere. And she was so sorry that I did it to please her! I wasn't a bit sorry myself, though. I hated Isabel like fun all the time, and could have slapped her, only that would have vexed Mary still more, so I didn't. You think me very bad, don't you? And so I am; it's in my nature, I believe, for I never seem to get any better. You don't know how some people provoke me, and Isabel used to do so terribly. She had a way of saying things that made me——' Lisa's face was expressive enough, though the rest of the sentence was left unfinished, and she added, more quietly, 'But I know I was silly, and that some of it was my own fault. Very likely we shall get on better now. I am older, and if I can't do anything else, I can hold my tongue. And, perhaps, if I don't always like what she says, that will be the best plan.'

'I think it will, most decidedly,' was the answer, in a tone of great amusement.

CHAPTER XI.

ISABEL'S RETURN.

ISABEL came, and with her arrived Janet Darrell, the wife of Arthur's elder brother, and Mr. Cunninghame Thorpe. Lisa, who was taking a French lesson at the time, and who heard the murmur of voices below, and then the rustle of silk dresses in the passage adjoining Mary's room, had her attention woefully distracted by these sounds, and fell into dire disgrace with Madame Ricard in consequence. It is to be feared, too, that the young lady was not so respectful as she ought to have been, and that the reproofs administered to her were by no means meekly received; for when Isabel, having dressed for dinner, came into the room some time afterwards, Madame was discovered in a highly excited state, and her pupil, with a very bright colour and saucily defiant air, was sitting on the opposite side of the table, coolly drawing a caricature of her wrathful instructress; nor did she even trouble herself to put the drawing out of sight when the door opened. Happily for both parties, however, the entrance of Isabel caused a diversion. In former

days she had been one of the favourite pupils of Madame, who was now so delighted to see her again and to converse once more in her own tongue with one who spoke it nearly as well as she did, that she forgot her anger—forgot also the lesson she was giving; and Lisa sat by in great contentment, inwardly thanking her cousin for the very pleasant interruption she had made.

Isabel was Mrs. Tennent's eldest daughter, and five or six years older than her sister Elinor, whom she resembled strongly in face and figure, although she was far more womanly and self-possessed in manner. Like her, too, she was ordinarily very quiet; but it was not with her as with Elinor, the quiet of indolence, but of thought and reflection. No one could look at Isabel, at her intellectual face and expressive eye, without seeing at once that she was talented in no ordinary degree; and no one who with such an impression sought her acquaintance, would have been disappointed in his expectations. And she was not only clever naturally, but had read much, and studied for the love of study; her knowledge of languages, music, and painting was wonderful; and her ardour in gaining information on all subjects that interested her was unwearied. As the eldest, and for some time the only child of the second family, she had been, when a little thing, a great pet with her half-brother and sister, who were proud of her extreme quickness and cleverness; with Percy more especially was she a favourite; and as she grew older, he

had had no greater pleasure than that of drawing her out, and encouraging her talents in every possible way. It was from him that she had first learned many things in which afterwards she found so much delight; and although he had left home while she was still a child, his influence had not gone with him. He had never forgotten the little sister of whom he had been so proud; nor had she on her side forgotten the brother whose interest in all she did and cared for, had made her occupations and pleasures doubly pleasant. They had corresponded constantly, and when after long years of absence he had returned to England, shortly before the breaking out of the Russian war, his visit then had been to her a time of intense and absorbing, though of quiet, undemonstrative delight. Undemonstrative indeed she always was, and not less so now than ever. Although Lisa felt that if she had been in her place, she would have been longing to get away to the brother from whom she had been so long separated; and although Isabel doubtless did wish to do so, yet she stood there quietly, listening to all that Madame had to say, and telling her in return a good deal of what they had seen and done in Paris during their recent three days' stay there; and then she had a few remarks to pass on changes that had taken place in the room in her absence, and one or two observations to make to her cousin on some trivial matter, before she finally left the room.

Lisa saw her afterwards in the green walk with Percy, deep in conversation, but pacing by his side soberly and quietly, with none of the animation about her which she herself would have found it difficult, almost impossible indeed, to repress under such circumstances; and when she met her later in the drawing-room, she was seated by her mother, discussing home news in a very matter-of-fact way. Lisa's attention, however, was diverted from her then, for there were others in the room, who, as being more of strangers, possessed greater interest for her at that moment. Janet Darrell was there, well-dressed and fashionable as she remembered her, when, three years before, she had come there as a bride; and at a window near her, stood her brother Cunninghame Thorpe talking to Elinor, who, certainly in the description she had once given of him, had by no means overrated his personal attractions.

He was very handsome; handsomer, Lisa thought, than any one she had ever seen before; and the marked contrast between him and her cousin Percy, who happened to be standing near, was very striking. The latter, perhaps, had never appeared so plain to her as he did at that moment; and for the first time for a long while, she felt a curious sensation of disappointment in looking at him. She had really forgotten latterly how very plain he was; and it was disagreeable to be reminded of it now. He seemed to be in one of his particularly sombre moods too, and his dark, thought-

ful face looked almost gloomy beside that of his gay, animated companion, who was evidently on the best of terms with himself and perfectly aware of his own fascinations. But Lisa was far too simple and unaffected herself to detect, in such a brief survey, the symptoms of self-consciousness which betrayed themselves in his 'get-up' and attitude; and her hasty glance at him was one of great admiration—admiration which he seemed to return with interest, when, as she was crossing the room to speak to her sister, he for the first time caught sight of her.

'By Jove, what a pretty girl! Who is she, and where on earth did she spring from?' was his eager exclamation; and the tone in which it was uttered, made Percy, to whom it was addressed, look as if he would have had no objection to knock him down. He vouchsafed no reply to the question. It was answered, however, by Janet, who had overheard the exclamation and turned round.

'Little Lisa Kennedy, I declare! Why, Lisa, who would have thought it!' holding out her hand as she spoke. 'How you have grown! I should hardly have known you again, only your face is not much altered: no, not at all,' she added, after looking at her for a moment. 'When do you mean to be less like a child, I wonder? You are growing up now, you know, and ought to begin to look a little older and more womanly.'

'Lisa has no wish to do that,' remarked Isabel.

'Unless she is very much altered lately, you could not, in her opinion, pay her a greater compliment than to tell her she has nothing of the woman about her. She has a particular dislike to being considered anything but a child.'

Lisa was silent; but something in the tone seemed to annoy her, and the colour mounted to her face. It was quite true that she had no desire to become a woman just at present, but she did not like to have it brought up as a fault against her that she was not one; and that Isabel thought it so she knew well enough, for the subject of her extreme childishness had been a fertile source of disagreement between them in former days. Janet, too, was eying her in a way which she disliked exceedingly; for she felt sure that, from some cause or other, her personal appearance did not meet with that lady's approval; nor could she wonder at this as she glanced at the handsome silk dress and jewellery worn by Mrs. Darrell, and contrasted them with her own very plain, coarse muslin (sadly creased and tumbled), with only a little bit of common lace for a tucker, and without even the simplest ribbon or ornament of any kind to set it off.

Ornaments, indeed, were things which she did not possess; she had never had any, with the exception of a solitary brooch, which she lost so soon after it was given her, that her aunt declared she should have nothing more of the sort until she had learned to be more

careful — a decision which Lisa had heard with the most perfect unconcern. She had no taste for such things, considering them a trouble and rather in the way than otherwise; and she was equally indifferent in general upon the subject also of her dress, seldom bestowing a thought on what she wore, and being quite satisfied with anything that was given her to put on. She would not have been aware of any deficiencies in her toilette at the present time, had not Janet's glance declared most unmistakably that something was wanting; and, although she was ignorant what it was, she felt uncomfortable at the scrutiny she was undergoing. She was glad when Mr. Thorpe, coming up to ask to be introduced to her, put a stop to it; and as he remained by her side for some time talking to her, she forgot her annoyance by degrees. Whatever his sister thought of her, he certainly seemed to find her acquaintance worth making; and she found him so agreeable, that she was quite sorry when her aunt broke off the conversation by sending her on some errand which kept her away so long that, before she returned, his attention was engaged elsewhere, and she saw but little more of him that evening. She could not help confiding to Mary afterwards, however, the favourable impression he had made upon her.

'He's so very pleasant,' she said, 'and so amusing! And he was telling me such a very entertaining story, when aunt Helen sent me away! I wish she hadn't; it

was very provoking of her, for I wanted to hear the end of it. I like hearing him talk, he has so much to say. And how handsome he is too, isn't he?'

'Very,' said Mary, smiling a little. 'Very handsome, indeed. And yet, do you know, Lisa, I am not sure that I quite like his face. I have seen others, certainly, that I like better.'

'Have you?' Lisa said, rather absently. She was thinking just then of the difference between Mr. Thorpe and her cousin Percy, and the thought appeared to change the current of her ideas, for, after a pause, she said, 'Percy is very fond of Isabel, Mary. I wonder how it is. He seems to care for her almost more than he does for you. It is very strange.'

'Is it? No, I don't think so. She is so very clever, and can enter into so many things with him that I know nothing about. And he helped so much to make her what she is, that it is only natural he should be proud and fond of her.'

'But not more than of you, Mary. You are his own sister, and she is not. It don't seem right that he should care for her more than he does for you. I don't like it.'

She spoke in her hasty, impatient way, and Mary laughed.

'I think you are mistaken. He cares for me quite as much as he does for Isabel, only it is in rather a different way. Surely, Lisa dear, you are not going to

try and make me jealous?' she added, smiling again. 'That would be very absurd. And I had just been thinking how pleasant it is for him to have her at home; and how pleasant for her, too, to see so much of him before he is obliged to go again. They are always so happy when they are together; she is more of a companion to him than I am; they have so many things in common, and can talk of all sorts of things that I don't understand. I am not clever, you know; I never was, and I don't fancy there is much chance of my becoming so now.'

Lisa was silent for a minute, and then she jumped up.

'I don't know whether you are clever or not,' she said, throwing her arms round her neck, and bestowing on her a most impetuous embrace. 'But I'm quite sure of one thing, and that is, that you are the dearest and best of Maries; and if all people that are not clever are like you, I like them a great deal better than those who are—that's all.'

And away she went.

'Where are you going, Percy?' she said, as she happened to meet him on the stairs one morning a few days afterwards—days during which she had seen, comparatively speaking, but little of him, his time and attention having been claimed almost incessantly by Isabel. 'Where are you going? And what are those things you have in your hand? Drawings?'

'No, illuminations.' And he spread them out on the wide seat of the window on the landing where they had met. 'They are some of Isabel's—of her own designing, and very good too. I was wishing you to see them.' And he showed an almost endless succession of beautifully-illuminated wreaths and crosses, leaves, flowers and berries, while Lisa looked on in a state of bewildered astonishment and admiration.

'Do you really mean to say she did all those herself? How exquisite they are, and how well done! It seems quite wonderful. I don't think I ever saw any, even for sale, so beautiful. It must be very difficult, isn't it?'

'Not the mechanical part, but of course for designing there must be both taste and talent. And Isabel has both. These are not her best, though, by any means. She has some which are much more elaborate; you must come and see them. I don't believe you have seen any of her last paintings either.'

'I have scarcely seen any of her paintings at all,' Lisa said, a little dolefully, 'except those few that are in the drawing-room. She never lets me go into her room. I don't know why, and I'm very sorry, for I've often wanted to look at her things.'

'Then you must come now,' Percy said, smiling: 'I am going there myself, and you must come with me. She will like it.'

'I don't think she will,' Lisa said, hanging back,

doubtfully, but he drew her on, and at the top of the stairs, hardly waiting for the ceremony of knocking, he opened the door of his sister's room.

It was a curious place, that room of Isabel's, and had been once fitted up as a sort of studio by Mrs. Tennent, who was very proud of her daughter's talents, and had lost no opportunity of encouraging them; but it seemed gradually to have been diverted from its original purpose, and although an easel stood near the window, and the walls were hung with drawings and paintings in all stages of progression, there were various other things lying about, which showed that her taste lay in many different directions. Cabinets filled with curiosities of natural history, and geological specimens which she had collected and arranged, antique ornaments and statuettes, casts in plaster of Paris, and models for sculpture, a harp and a guitar, were some of the most conspicuous objects; and the tables and chairs, and even the floor, were piled with books and manuscripts which she had pulled down from their shelves as she wanted them for reference, and never replaced. To the uninitiated, indeed, the place appeared a chaos of confusion, through which it seemed impossible for any one to make their way without displacing or treading on some of the numerous treasures that lay there; and Lisa stood at the entrance and looked with astonishment, not altogether unmixed with a certain feeling of awe, at the curious aspect of this 'private den,' into which she had

never yet found admittance. Nor was she to find it then.

'Here, Isabel, I'm bringing you a visitor,' Percy said. 'Lisa tells me she has never been here before, and she has a great desire to see your paintings. She is come to look at them, and to make acquaintance with your room. May we come in?'

Isabel was standing at her easel with her eyes fixed on a copy of an 'Ecce Homo,' by Guercino, which lay before her, and as she did not turn when her brother spoke, perhaps she was not aware that Lisa herself was already at the door.

'Nonsense, Percy, don't bring that child here,' she exclaimed, hastily. 'She knows nothing about these kind of things, and does not care for them. Pray don't let her come and interfere with us.'

Percy's face changed; there was a shade upon it for a moment, but it disappeared, and he turned to Lisa with a smile.

'Never mind; she is so deep in her studies that she does not know what she is saying. You must not wait for an invitation, you see; you must come in without one. She'll soon find how nearly your tastes and hers are alike.'

But Lisa drew back, her face crimson, her eyes flashing.

'No, thank you, I never go where I'm not wanted.'

She pulled her hand from his, and turning, flew

down stairs. He could not stop her; she was out of sight in a moment; and when he followed to try and discover where she had gone, there were no traces to be seen of her, nor would she answer when called. She had rushed off to the far end of the garden, and there, crouching down between some raspberry bushes, she lay hidden in a very disconsolate fit; and although she saw her cousin walking about in search of her, and knew that he was wanting her to come out, she was too angry and miserable to show herself, and for a long time she had a hard fight to keep back the tears which would rise to her eyes.

'I knew how it would be,' she said to herself; 'I knew it would be quite impossible for Isabel and me to get on together, though he did say he wanted us to know and like each other. But she *won't* like me; she thinks me good for nothing, and won't believe I ever want to be better. And she will make him think so too. That will be the end of it, I'm sure, and then he won't care for me any more. I don't believe he does now, indeed; I don't think he cares for me half as much as he did two or three days ago, before she came.' But although she said this to herself in a fierce, indignant way, Lisa could not help smiling a little, for in her heart of hearts she did not believe her own assertion. 'Well, I won't care anything about him then. He and Isabel may do as they like, and I won't trouble myself about them. That will be the best way, and he'll see

then that I can be very happy without him. They shan't think I'm making myself miserable, at any rate.'

And with this determination she dried her eyes, and having pondered some little time longer, and growing tired of doing nothing, and of having only the raspberry bushes for companions, she left her hiding-place at length, and betook herself to some other employment. She did not see Percy again until the afternoon, when, as she was sitting on the floor by the window in Mary's room reading, he opened the door and put his head in.

'Lisa, I want to speak to you for a minute.'

'Can't come,' she said, without looking up from her book.

'Not for one minute? I won't keep you, and I'm going out directly. I shall not be back again this evening.'

'You must wait till to-morrow, then. I'm busy now.'

'Why, my dear Lisa, you are not doing anything in particular,' said Mary, looking round from a sum of Susan's that she was correcting. 'You can spare a minute or two surely!'

'No, Mary dear, I can't, it's quite impossible,' jumping up as she spoke, and walking off to the piano; 'I have my music to practise before tea, and I shan't have time for it if I don't mind. I know what Percy's minutes are when he begins to talk.' She closed the argument by dashing into a very noisy polka, (by way

perhaps of exercising her fingers a little, before beginning her regular practice), and Percy was obliged to leave the room.

But he did not find the opportunity he wanted for speaking to her even on the following day. She kept out of his reach altogether, and would have nothing to do with him, refusing either to give or listen to explanations, stopping her ears when he began to say anything, and dancing off to shut herself up in her own room when she found no other way of silencing him. Nor would she go on with any of the occupations which lately had given her so much pleasure. Singing, which, in spite of her having once said she would never learn it, she had begun to practise diligently under Mary's superintendence on purpose to please him, was now neglected: it made her throat ache, she said, and she did not want to go on with it; the books, too, which he had lent her to read were thrown aside, and her drawings were thrust into a corner of some shelf with a quantity of waste paper and other rubbish.

'Where is that last one you were doing, Lisa?' he asked one day when something happened to be said about them in his presence. 'You must have finished it by this time. Will you let me look at it?'

'No; it's not done,' she said carelessly. 'And I don't intend to finish it. I'm tired of drawing now; it's stupid work. I mean to give it up. One can't go on for ever with such quiet things; and now that I can run

about again, I like that better than sitting still. We are all going over to Copelands this afternoon to make hay, and Mr. Thorpe is coming with us. That will be much greater fun than poking over a piece of paper with a pencil and a bit of india-rubber.'

Percy was silent, but she saw that she had vexed him, and she went away with a smile upon her face. It was so very amusing to think that she—such a little thing as she was—could vex a great tall man like him, and so silly, too, of him to be vexed at anything she could do, that she felt quite proud of her exploit and repeated it on every possible occasion. Never had she been so capricious, perverse, and tormenting as she was during the few days that followed; and Percy, who had found her lately so different, and who had begun to be aware how much his happiness was bound up in her, felt the change bitterly. She had not the least idea how seriously he was annoyed by her wilfulness and caprice, or she would have considered twice, perhaps, before giving so much pain to one whom she really liked, and who had done a great deal at times to please her. It was mere thoughtlessness on her part; she liked the amusement of the thing; she liked to see him look grave and vexed, and to think she had the power of making him so. And it was a gratification which she had very often at that time.

CHAPTER XII.

PENITENCE.

BUT Lisa's wayward fit, after lasting a few days, was brought to an end unexpectedly by a little incident that took place one evening in Mr. Pye's meadows. She had been spending the afternoon there and had been amusing herself in the erection of an enormous hay-cock, much to her own satisfaction and that of the younger children, who had been assisting in the work, when she suddenly discovered that she had lost a very pretty little silk handkerchief which Mary had given her that very morning. It had been only loosely tied round her neck, and of course had slipped off when she was too busy to notice her loss.

'Oh, my handkerchief! Where is it gone! Do help me find it, Mr. Thorpe,' to that gentleman, who happened to come up just then with Percy. 'I wouldn't lose it for anything; it's such a dear little thing, and Mary gave it me.'

Mr. Thorpe obeyed with all alacrity, beginning by demolishing the hay-cock, in which it was most likely to be secreted, and Percy assisted in the search, while she

stood by lamenting, or rather pretending to do so, for after a minute or two she seemed to forget that she cared about it, and while still repeating in doleful accents 'how sorry she was, and how much she would give to find it,' she was really much more taken up with watching her cousin, whose blind way of carrying on the hunt amused her exceedingly. She had often laughed at him formerly, for 'that odd habit he had of screwing up his eyes, as if he thought he could see better when they were shut,' though she had never gone so far as to let him overhear her remarks upon the subject or know that she was making fun of him. But she was just then in one of her most reckless moods, which made her not only forget common politeness, but a good deal more too, which at another time she would have been the first to remember; and, after watching him for some minutes with every appearance of amusement in her face, she next proceeded to twist up a hay-stalk in the shape of an eye-glass, and, applying it to her eye, walked about after him, picking up little things which she frowned over and subjected to a minute and very exaggerated inspection, greatly to the diversion of Mr. Thorpe, who, while watching her movements, forgot the search he himself was professing to carry on. For some time Percy was not at all aware of what she was doing, being quite taken up with looking for the handkerchief she seemed to prize so much, but his suspicions were awakened at last in consequence of one

or two smothered bursts of laughter from Susan and Constance, and, happening once to turn rather suddenly, he caught Lisa with the pretended glass to her eye in the act of exchanging a glance of ill-suppressed merriment with Mr. Thorpe. It was not what he had expected. That he was not improved by his near-sightedness, he knew well enough, and if she alone had chosen to laugh at him on that account, he would have thought nothing of it, he would have laughed too; but that she should amuse herself at his expense with a comparative stranger was what he had not looked for, and Lisa no sooner met his eye than she saw at once she had gone too far. He did not say a word, but she read his face; she saw she had wounded him deeply, and all her wilful recklessness vanished in a moment. She was miserable; she would have given anything to rush up to him and tell him she was sorry—that she had been thoughtless and rude, but that she would never be so again. But Mr. Thorpe was standing there, and she could not speak. She turned away, hot, blinding tears in her eyes, and caring for nothing so that no one took any notice of her, or knew how wretched she was.

The handkerchief was found. After a long search, Percy discovered it at length, in some hay at a little distance, and brought it to her just when she was beginning to fear she had quite lost it. She took it in silence; she could not thank him, and, tying it round

her neck again, she walked back to the farm, feeling more miserable than ever. Mr. Thorpe chose to keep her company all the way home, and she saw nothing more of her cousin till quite late that evening, when, as she was passing through the hall on her way upstairs for the night, she heard the house-door open, and looking round saw him just coming in. She had thought that she must wait till morning to make her confession — to ask him to forgive her; but now here was the very opportunity she was longing for, she could speak to him at once if she liked; and after a moment's hesitation, looking very shy and very miserable, but at the same time very determined, she walked straight up to him.

'Percy,' he was stooping down, but he started as she spoke, and looked up, 'Percy, I was very rude to you this evening, very rude indeed. But won't you forgive me? You don't know how sorry I am.' Her lip quivered, and her eyes were full of tears as she spoke.

Percy's face brightened strangely. He must, indeed, have been very different from what he was, if he could have resisted such an appeal and remembered his annoyance. He forgot it completely, his only thought being, that she was at that moment the prettiest and most loveable little creature he had ever seen.

'Never mind, Lisa,' he said with a smile; 'it was foolish of me to care anything about it. I might have known better than to take such a thing amiss from you,

even if I did from anyone else. You meant nothing, I am quite sure. And I believe I am awkward at times; you had a legitimate excuse for your amusement.'

'I hadn't; it was all my naughtiness. Oh, Percy, I *am* sorry! Won't you say that you forgive me? I shall never be happy if you don't.'

'Won't you? Then, pray, be happy directly. I don't think my forgiveness is so very necessary, but if you ask for it you may be quite sure that you have it.'

'For all? For everything? For it isn't only to-night I've been so bad. It's all this week. I've tormented you and done everything I could to vex you, just because I was angry with Isabel. And you have been so kind to me! Oh, dear, I wish I were not so wicked! You see, when I once begin to get angry I don't know what I do, or when to leave off. And I've been dreadfully provoking to you, and done all sorts of things that I knew you didn't like. I'm very sorry now. I think, Percy, please, that if you'll forgive me, I'll never do it again. I'll try and be much better.'

'My dear Lisa, don't look so dreadfully penitent,' he said, with an attempt at a laugh; 'you are not in the confessional, you know, nor have I seen anything at all of the "wickedness" you talk of. I am very sorry Isabel vexed you so much the other day, but I know it was quite unintentionally she did it. If she had known you were there, she would not have said what she did; and if you would only have let me

speak to you a little sooner, we might have made things right directly. She wanted me to tell you afterwards that she was sorry, and that she should be very glad if you would go in whenever you like.'

'Why didn't she tell me so herself, then?' thought Lisa, though she did not say so. She only answered decidedly, 'There's not much fear of my troubling her often with my presence. Never mind about her, though,' she added hastily, seeing that he was on the point of saying something else. 'It's only you I cared for, and if you'll really forgive me and forget how bad I've been the last few days, I don't want anything else, and I'll never be provoking again. Will you shake hands with me, please, and let us be quite friends now?'

Percy smiled as he held out his hand, and they parted on most amicable terms.

'I've brought you my drawing to look at,' Lisa said, making her appearance in the library the next day. 'It's quite done now; I worked at it a whole hour this morning, and I don't think it's very badly done either. What do you say? And,' looking at him with a mixture half of fun, half of shyness, 'my throat is well again now. It's better than it has been for ever so long. Mary and I are going to have some singing by and by. I think you might as well come and listen to us—if you like, that is—and then I can give you some tea afterwards. You will find it pleasanter upstairs with us than sitting down here by yourself.'

Her naughtiness and caprice were quite gone, for the time at least; and, being only anxious to make amends in every possible way for her late waywardness, she took the greatest pains now to please him, and became as docile and amiable as the most obedient child. And he, only too delighted at this new change for the better, forgot all the annoyances of the past week—forgot that she could be anything but what she then was, and thought her more charming than ever. How often, indeed, he was dreaming of her when he ought to have been thinking of other things, it would have been hard to say, but if Isabel's complaints at that time of his frequent distractions were to be believed, they must have been something alarming. They certainly gave her great cause for dissatisfaction, although she was at first puzzled to account for them.

He was lying on the grass one morning, reading, or professing to read, when Lisa came dancing up to him with her hands behind her, and evidently in a state of great delight.

'I've something for you,' she exclaimed eagerly; 'something to give you. Would you like to have it?'

'Very much,' raising himself on his elbow as he spoke. 'What is it? May I see?'

'Oh, no, no, no' dancing back a little; 'you must guess. I won't give it you unless you do, at least I think not. And you had better lie still; I always pity you, do you know, when you have to get up from the

ground, you are so very tall. Besides, you will see perhaps if you get up, and I don't want you to do that; you *must* guess. It's something you like very much, something you are always glad to have. Don't you know?'

'Not in the least. I haven't an idea.'

'You haven't an idea! Oh Percy, you must have! Don't you know what you like very much, and what I remember you said something about at breakfast this morning? Oh, you must know now. It's very odd,' she continued, still dancing backwards and forwards before him, 'very odd, indeed. I think—excuse my saying it—but really I do think you must be uncommonly stupid not to guess.'

'I am glad you say "uncommonly" stupid,' he said, with a smile, and so busy looking at her that he never thought of noticing a little basket, of which she kept giving glimpses from time to time, as if to invite his attention to it. 'But there are so many things I like, and that I should be glad to have. How can I possibly tell what you may choose to give me?'

'Ah, it's not a grand present,' Lisa said, stopping short in her dance: not like Prince,' turning to her dog, who was sitting near, watching her movements, and who began to bark at this mention of his name. 'I have no money, you know; I can't give you anything like him. No; this is only a little thing, a very little thing, and it cost me nothing, but I think you will like it for all that. And if you can't guess what it is, why, it

must be because you are thinking of something else, and you don't deserve to have it. But I suppose you must, because I've had all the trouble of gathering them. There it is!' producing a basket of strawberries. 'Didn't you say this morning that you liked strawberries particularly, and you wished we had more in the garden, because our own are so much fresher and better than those we buy?'

'So I did. But I had forgotten. I suppose, as you say, I was thinking of something else.'

'I suppose you were,' was the answer, in rather a saucy tone. 'And it strikes me that you are often thinking of "something else." I don't believe your thoughts are ever where they should be. But take care what you are doing now, and don't upset them all while you are thinking of your "something." They are meant to be eaten, not to be thrown on the grass.'

'So I should imagine, and very good they look too. But you don't think I am going to eat all these! Where did you get them?'

'From my garden. And you are to eat them all—every one. I got them on purpose for you. They are the first I have had this year, except some I gave Mary yesterday, for mine were behind everybody else's. They are very nice though, now they are come, and you must eat them, yes, all of them,' as he was beginning a remonstrance. 'I don't want them myself;

I don't indeed; I meant them for you; I've been watching them ever so long, and you must have them to please me. I'm going to sit here and see you eat them.'

She placed herself on the grass in front of him, and for some time seemed determined to carry out her resolve of being only a spectator of the feast, but, as he persisted in declaring that conscience would not allow him to eat them alone, she was induced at last to take her share, and, under their combined attack, the contents of the basket speedily disappeared. She was laughing at the rapidity with which they had vanished, when the sound of voices at the garden door made her look round, and a moment after, Janet Darrell, with her brother and Isabel, came upon the lawn. Percy got up as he saw them approaching, but Lisa sat still where she was, and, being seized apparently with a tidy fit, picked up the strawberry stalks and leaves that lay about, and began most industriously to fill her basket with them. Isabel scrutinised her narrowly as she came up.

'Where is Mary, Lisa? I thought you were always with her at this time.'

'Mary's out; she's gone to the school,' was the answer. 'Mrs. Rivers wanted her particularly, so she gave us a holiday.'

'Oh!' And Isabel glanced at her brother. But he [illegible]ee her; he was listening to what Janet was [illegible]m about some arrangements they had been

making for a certain pic-nic to an old castle in the neighbourhood.

'It is all settled for next Thursday,' she was saying. 'We have just been to the Frasers and have talked it over with them. We shall be a very large party, for everybody that has been asked means to come; and in the evening we are going to get up a dance. The courtyard of the castle will be a famous place for the purpose, and Colonel Fraser has promised us the band of the —th. We can have a regular ball if we like.'

Cunninghame Thorpe in the mean time had seated himself on a garden bench, near Lisa. 'Fine old place, Hazeldean,' he remarked to her. 'Fine place for those who admire that style of thing. Can't say I do myself much. Never had much fancy for tumble-down castles, ruins and such like; but many people find them very interesting, and for those who do, Hazeldean is the place to go to. Splendid view from the top too, they say, and plenty of wood about. You know it, of course?'

'No, I don't; I have never been there.'

'Never been there! Ah, well, you'll like going then. It's just the place for a pic-nic; and if you are an admirer of antiquities, you'll explore the castle, I suppose. You must let me be your escort on the occasion,' lowering his voice a little, 'for, although I don't care for such things in general, it will be very different if you——'

'I shall not go,' Lisa interrupted rather hastily and in some confusion. 'I never go anywhere, you know; I am not "come out."'

'Oh, confound it! I beg your pardon, but surely a thing like this! Mrs. Tennent would not object, would she? You must ask her; she will never be so cruel as to keep you at home. Exploring ruins and woods is such a very harmless amusement, and can't hurt any young lady, even if she is not introduced. Ask her, at any rate. You must indeed. She won't refuse, I am sure.'

Lisa shook her head. 'I shouldn't think of it. No,' in a tone of great disappointment. 'I am very sorry, for I should have enjoyed it so much. But there is no chance of my going; so it's no use talking of it. Please don't say any more, for it will only make me want to go, when I know very well that I can't.' And she turned away when he was beginning some fresh persuasion, though she could not help still listening to what was passing among the others with regard to the proposed excursion, to join which would have been the greatest of pleasures to her. She had heard all that had often before been said about it; she had listened to long talks about the castle, the old woods and the dripping well; and now she pictured to herself the delights of dining out of doors, and of a dance upon the grass in the evening, and she felt that she would have given anything to go. But of course there was not a chance of it, she knew that well enough; so she only

sat and listened in silence, her face betraying clearly something of the disappointment she felt, though it was not disappointment arising from the causes to which Mr. Thorpe, who was watching her, seemed to attribute it. As far as he was concerned, she did not care in the least whether she went or not; of the two, perhaps she would rather have stayed away. She had seen a good deal of him during the last fortnight, for, as Elinor had conjectured would be the case, he found the Moat a dull place, and was constantly making his way over to Atherstone, when, as a matter of course, he came to the Priory, and was now on a most familiar footing there. But the close acquaintance which this state of things had brought about had by no means tended to strengthen the impression which a handsome face and pleasing manners had first made upon Lisa. She had come indeed, to think these manners anything but pleasing, now that she knew more of him; and, had it been possible, she would gladly have avoided him altogether. She certainly took a great deal of pains to do so, and the ingenuity she had displayed lately in her devices for keeping out of his way was really remarkable; but unfortunately it did not meet with all the success it deserved, and, in spite of her utmost endeavours, she often found herself baffled by his pertinacity in seeking her out and forcing his society upon her whether she liked or not. She did not care enough about him to feel provoked at these proceedings,

but it was tiresome to be finding him constantly at her side when she least expected it, and to have to listen to conversation in which she took no interest, and a great deal of which she did not understand. His fine speeches indeed were completely lost upon her; she either did not know what he meant, or, if she did, she looked shy and grave, and always made her escape as quickly as possible, thinking he had a very unpleasant way of talking, and wondering how it was that she felt so different with him from what she did when with her cousin. She never had any uncomfortable feelings when Percy was talking to her; she could tell him anything she liked, and nothing he ever said had the effect of making her confused and embarrassed, as Cunninghame Thorpe's compliments so often did. She had long since arrived at the conclusion that her cousin was by far the more agreeable companion of the two, and that, even when he was in one of his grave moods and said nothing at all, his society was infinitely preferable to that of her new acquaintance, anxious as he seemed to make himself in his own way agreeable to her. At the present time he must have seen that his attempts to do so were a failure, for she did not try to conceal that she was bored, rather than otherwise, by his attentions, and, after yawning very often both privately and openly, and only giving half-answers to what he said to her, she made up her mind at last that it was stupid work sitting there to hear long discussions on a pleasure

in which she could have no share, and, getting up, she sauntered off towards the house. But before she had gone many steps she was joined by Percy. He had noticed the wistful expression of her face while she was listening to what was being said about the proposed excursion, and had guessed something of what was passing in her mind.

'You would like to go to this pic-nic too, Lisa, would you not? Have you never been to Hazeldean?'

'No, never.'

'And you wish to go?'

She smiled a little: 'You read my thoughts, did you? But of course it's no use wishing. I did think certainly, how very pleasant it would be if I could go. I want so much to see the old castle, and I am so fond of dancing! Dancing on the grass too, it must be so delightful! But I know very well that I needn't think of it. Aunt Helen would never let me go. It is to be quite a large party, you see; besides, she never lets me go anywhere. Oh, no; it's quite impossible, I know that.' And she walked away.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TALK, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

THAT afternoon Lisa was sitting very busy with a French lesson in her own room. She liked to take her books there, for she could learn better when alone; and, moreover, she was fond of her little closet, especially in the summer time, and always shut herself up there when she had anything to do. The great charm of the place must have consisted in its being her own, for there was nothing else about it to make it very attractive. It was very small—a cupboard her cousins sometimes rather contemptuously styled it—and poorly furnished. The floor, with the exception of one narrow strip of carpet, was bare, the walls were unpapered, and the bed, which was a very little one, was without hangings. Everything in the room indeed was little, for it would not have admitted anything on a large scale. A little chest of drawers, a little wash-hand stand, and one little chair made up the rest of the furniture, and not much taste had been consulted in the choice of these articles. Anything would do for Lisa, said Mrs. Tennent, on the principle, most probably, that beggars must not be

choosers, and if Lisa herself thought she would have liked to have some things different, that she would have been glad to have the floor rather more covered, a prettier looking-glass than that shabby, cracked thing which graced, or rather disgraced, the top of her drawers, a few flower-pots perhaps to stand in the window, and some little ornaments such as her cousins had in their rooms, she did not say so, and consoled herself in general with the reflection that the place was, at least, her own, and that she could do what she liked there; being always safe from intrusion, except when her aunt paid periodical visits for the purpose of inspecting her clothes and administering lectures, when, as was usually the case, her drawers were found a chaos of confusion. But at other times she seldom saw anyone in her little closet, and she felt so much at home and so secluded when she liked to shut herself up there, that she forgot its discomforts in the pleasures of undisputed possession and freedom. She had not much leisure indeed, to indulge in any discontented feelings on the subject, for when there in the daytime she was generally too busy to give many thoughts to the surroundings of the place, and at night she always fell asleep too soon and slept too soundly, to think of such things. And if the room did look rather bare sometimes, in the early morning, when the tapping of the lime-tree boughs upon her window roused her, as it often did, from her slumbers before it

was time to get up, she did not mind it then, for she could hear the first notes of the birds in the garden and see the sunlight playing on the green leaves as the breezes stirred them; and these sights and sounds brought thoughts of other happy things, and carried her from her dingy room in the midst of a crowded town, to country meadows and country woods far away, over which the free winds were blowing, and where wild flowers were springing and green boughs waving, whose beauty would never be soiled by the dust and smoke that so soon darkened the Priory trees, lovely as these looked in the spring and early summer. Now, although it was only the end of June, their freshness had all passed away, and, like men grown prematurely old with the burden and cares of life, they had settled down into the heavy, sombre aspect which they always wore in the long hot months. Beautiful, however, Lisa thought them still, for green of any shade had a charm for her; and then, too, the trees themselves were old friends—she had watched them bud and come to leaf, and fade, for many and many a year—and familiar things have always a beauty of their own. She liked to sit and look up into their deep recesses—to hear the loud humming of the bees among their flowers, and to catch glimpses of blue sky between their leaves; and she liked to look beyond them and see the jackdaws wheeling round the tower of the old Priory Church, whose grey massive walls, mantling ivy, and hourly chimes had

been objects of the deepest interest and veneration to her ever since the day when, as a little child, she had first seen and heard them. On a summer's day like the present—when the glory that was haunting the country round penetrated even the dusky town, when the sunshine was lying in a golden flood upon the lawn, and soft airs crept by, hardly raising the leaves as they passed, when there was a perfect chorus of insect life among the trees, and the stir and tumult in the busy streets sounded far off and indistinct—on such a day as this she could have sat for hours in the dreamy luxury of doing nothing and enjoying everything; and perhaps it was the consciousness that she had been indulging too long in this same luxury, and that her occupation, or want of occupation, might not be altogether approved by the higher powers if enquiry came to be made as to what she had been doing, that made her turn away her head from the window at last, and, stopping her ears, keep her eyes fixed most resolutely on her book while she conned the long piece of Racine's 'Mithridate' which Madame Ricard had given her to learn. She had still got her head down, and was going over her lesson very diligently, when a little stone thrown through the window and alighting on her book made her look up. Percy was standing in the green walk below.

'Come down, Lisa; I want you,' he said. 'What are you doing there?'

'Learning a lesson—a French lesson for Madame.' And she held up her book.

'Never mind the French! Put it away now, and come down; I want you.'

'Why, Percy,' and she looked very much astonished, 'that isn't like you! You always tell me to finish my work before I begin to amuse myself, and I haven't half done yet. Besides, Mary told me to be sure and learn this before I did anything else. I must do it, I think—' She hesitated.

'Yes, of course; you are right. Well, come when you are ready, then; you won't be long, I suppose?'

'Not very; I'll make haste. But what do you want me for? Anything particular?'

'I'll tell you when you come. You'll find me at the bottom of the walk.' And he turned away.

'I wonder what it is?' Lisa thought. 'Something pleasant, I am sure; for I think I saw him smiling.' And, stopping her ears once more, she pored over her book most intently for the next quarter of an hour, until the lesson was fairly learnt, and had been said from beginning to end without a mistake; then dashing down the volume on the floor (that was an accident, for she had meant to throw it on the bed), away she went. Her foot was strong again now, and she took her accustomed jump at the bottom of the stairs, and then flew off through the garden door into the green walk, where,

true to his promise, she found Percy waiting for her. She danced up to him eagerly.

'Here I am! I've done at last; and very glad I am. And now I hope you have some pleasant news to tell me. You look as if you had, and I am sure I want something to refresh me after that horrid Racine. How I wish that man had never been born! He's the plague of my life. Madame is so fond of him, and I just detest him. Why can't he make his men and women talk like sensible human beings, instead of always indulging in rhyming effusions? Nothing happens to them but they immediately turn their ideas into neatly finished couplets. Here I have left Mithridate dying, and he says—

> Dans cet embrassement dont la douceur me flatte,
> Venez et recevez l'âme de Mithridate.

Actually dies with a rhyme in his mouth—as if it were possible! I don't like such nonsense. But what do you want me for? Have you anything to tell me?'

'Yes, I have. Didn't you say this morning that you would like to go to Hazeldean next Thursday?'

Lisa looked up at him a little doubtfully: 'Yes, I did. I should like it beyond everything. But what do you mean? I know I can't go.'

'Do you?' he said with a smile. 'I am not so sure of that. Unless you wish to stay at home, I don't think there will be anything to prevent you. Mrs. Tennent has no objection to your going.'

'No objection? Aunt Helen? She will let me go?' Lisa exclaimed, not very coherent in her surprise and joy. 'But no; you can't be in earnest! You don't really mean I may go? It must be a mistake!' And her face, which had brightened up with eagerness, sobered down again for a moment.

'No; I shouldn't tell you such a thing, Lisa, if you were likely to be disappointed. It is not a mistake at all. I asked Mrs. Tennent myself, and she told me she would let you. You will hear it from her by and bye.'

Lisa's face flushed with mingled astonishment and delight. 'You asked her? Then it's your doing, Percy? You did it because you knew how much I should like it!'

He smiled. 'That was my reason, Lisa. I wasn't wrong, was I? It will give you pleasure to go?'

'Pleasure! Oh, so much!' And she looked up at him with a very radiant face. 'I am so glad, so pleased—so—oh! I don't know what—only I shall like it so very much. And it was so very kind of you to get me the pleasure. That is what I think of most. I like that better almost than the going itself. I wonder, though, what made you think of it—why, indeed, you so often think of what will please me?'

'Do I?' he said, the thought crossing his mind that anyone who had seen her face just then, would have felt very little wonder at the circumstance. 'I am glad

to hear it. Do you think it so very strange, though, that anyone should wish to please you?'

'I don't know. I don't fancy many people do. Mary does, but not anybody else very often; and she couldn't have done such a thing as this if she had wished it ever so much. Aunt Helen would not have let me go if she had asked. But, oh dear! I can hardly believe it. Fancy seeing the castle and the beautiful woods there, and dining out of doors and dancing in the evening! How very delightful it will be! I don't know anything I should like so much! Percy, I am so much obliged to you for asking for me. It was so very kind of you! I wish I could do something for you too; don't you think I could?' she added eagerly. 'You are always doing things for me; is there nothing I can do for you?—nothing that will give you a little pleasure?'

'And you think it is not pleasure enough, then, to see you pleased, Lisa?' he said in a curious sort of tone, half light, half earnest.

'Oh, no, I don't. I know you like to please me, or you wouldn't take so much trouble to do it. But still—'

'But still you think so much of a very little, that you feel quite oppressed by the amount of gratitude that is burdening you. Well, you shall pay me if you like, Lisa; you shall give me a great pleasure.'

'Yes. What is it?' with great eagerness.

'Will you keep two dances for me on Thursday?'

Lisa looked very much amused. 'To be sure I will; as many as you like. But do you really mean that will be any pleasure to you? I didn't know you cared for dancing.'

'Didn't you? It depends on my partner certainly a good deal. I don't care to dance with everybody, but when I know and like a person it is very different. I shall enjoy it very much with you, Lisa; so don't forget you are engaged for the first two.'

'No, I won't; but, as far as that goes, I could dance with you the whole evening, for nobody else is likely to ask me.'

'Are they not?' he said, smiling a little. 'I don't know that. You will not have more difficulty in getting partners, I suppose, than anyone else.'

Lisa shook her head. 'I shall be so much younger than anyone else,' she said, 'and I don't know the people. A great many of them I have never seen at all, and some only once or twice. There is Mr. Watts, to be sure; perhaps he may a k me, and—Mr. Thorpe; oh! I had forgotten him.' And the recollection, to judge from her face, did not seem to bring any very pleasant thoughts with it.

'It would be much pleasanter; I should enjoy it a good deal more if they were not here,' she said after some meditation.

'They! Who are they?'

'Mr. Thorpe, and—and Isabel. Percy, I am very sorry, but I am quite sure she will never like me, that we shall never get to know each other as you said you hoped we should. It's something in myself, I know, but I can't help it. She makes me angry. I was very angry last night,' alluding to something that had passed the day before. 'You saw it, I suppose?'

'I saw you did not like what she said. But I think you misunderstood her, Lisa. She never intended to vex you, I am sure.'

Lisa put up her shoulder a little pettishly; but after a pause she said humbly, 'I was wrong, I know. I thought so afterwards. I had no business to be so angry. And,' with a sigh, 'I suppose what she said was true. I ought to take a great deal more pains about many things than I do. You think so too, don't you?'

'I do, Lisa,' he said frankly: 'I think it a great pity you don't pay more attention to some of the little things which, in my opinion, make up a large part of a woman's duties. It is a woman's business, is it not, to make home as pleasant as possible; and how can she do that, if she does not make herself attractive, by cultivating to the very utmost of her power every gift she has? Let it be beauty or talents, or pleasing manners, or whatever she has, she may be quite sure it has been given her for some good purpose, and that she is bound to make the most of it. And if she does not do so, if she is careless of it and takes no

trouble to give pleasure to those about her by studying the little things—the little elegancies that make all the difference in home life—she is not doing her duty. She is wasting the good things that have been given her.'

Lisa was silent for a few minutes; she was looking rather surprised. 'You think, then, that women ought to make a great deal of themselves and of everything they have? That would make them very vain, wouldn't it?'

'Why should it, if it is done from a right motive? The thing is, that so many women are not content with making themselves as pretty and agreeable as they can in their own homes, and to please those who care for them—they go out to look for admiration from strangers. They will spend a fortune in dressing to go into society, and to attract attention from people who know and care nothing about them; but anything is good enough for home, where there is only a brother or a husband to see them. That comes from vanity, if you like, Lisa; but a woman who takes trouble to make herself look nice for those she loves, will not be vain, you may be quite sure.'

'No, I shouldn't think she would. But then, a great many women can't always do as they like; perhaps they haven't the money to dress as they wish, or to make themselves look as nice as they would if they were richer.'

'Very likely not; there are a great many of course in that case, but I was talking of those who have the means. If people are able to spend so much when they go out, let them spare a little for home too; and if they have not enough for both, let home come first, I say. But, after all, it is not so much what they spend as how they spend it, and taste and care will make a woman look well dressed on very little. And I never like to see anyone without that taste and care, for I always think she can be doing very little towards making her home a pleasant one.'

Lisa was silent again; she stood leaning against a tree, pulling to pieces some flowers which she had gathered as they walked. There was a deep blush on her face, and when she looked up at last, it was with some embarrassment.

'I am very sorry, Percy. I never thought about these things before, do you know. Of course I knew I was very careless, and that I ought not to be so—that I ought to be neat and take pains about a great many things that I didn't; but still it never came into my head that it would make so much difference, or that I was not doing my duty at home. And you say you don't like anyone who does not do that; of course you don't—nobody would. I'm very sorry.'

'My dear Lisa, I didn't mean that for you; you must not think so for a moment. I said "a woman," and although,' with a smile, 'I suppose you can lay claim to

the title in one way, yet you are quite young enough to be able to make yourself what you like; and, from what I know of you, I am quite sure that what you will like will be to make yourself everything a woman ought to be. But no one would think of judging you at present as they would a grown-up person. You are too young now to see many things as you will by and bye. A year or two, you will find, will make a great difference to you in many ways.'

'Yes,' a little doubtfully. 'I needn't wait a year or two, though, to make a difference in one way;' and she glanced down at her dress. 'I shall not be much older to-morrow than to-day, but you shall not see me so untidy then; you never shall again. I can't change what I wear, to be sure; and I can't help it if my things are not so pretty as I should like, because I don't choose them myself. Aunt Helen buys them all for me, and I don't think she always gets me very pretty ones; but still I can put them on properly, and I can make my collars look nice. I can plait my hair, too, as I do Mary's sometimes; and I know you like that, for you said once when I had done it, how well it looked and you wished I would do mine the same way.'

'Yes, I remember. You have such beautiful hair, Lisa.' He said it gravely, as if he were stating an acknowledged fact, not paying a compliment; nor did she take it as one, though she looked very much pleased.

'I am so glad you like it!' she said simply.

'Yes, I like it better than any I have ever seen; that shade of golden brown is so very uncommon. I recollect noticing it the first night I came home. You were sitting talking to Arthur, I remember, for a long time, and the light from the lamp was on your head. You looked very bright altogether that evening, Lisa; you made a very pretty picture,' he added, with a smile.

Lisa half smiled too, but her colour rose. The thought now, of that evening and of all the foolish things she had then said, was not very pleasant, and she would have been very glad to forget it entirely. It was not often, indeed, that she did remember it, except when some chance remark like the present recalled it to her mind, and perhaps brought some astonishment with it at the difference between her former and present feelings, little as she was most probably aware of the extent of that change.

She went away now full of plans for carrying out her new resolutions, and anyone who on the following morning had seen the earnestness with which she set to work to make the most of her very simple dress, would have smiled at the alteration which a few hours had effected in her ideas of the importance of things which she generally overlooked and despised. Not a hair now was out of its place, and every plait was most carefully arranged (she was so glad Percy liked her hair, she wondered whether he liked anything else about her too), and then clean collar and cuffs were put on, and a

waist-band hunted up from an indescribable wilderness of rubbish in one of her drawers (those drawers would be all the better, by the bye, for being made tidy; she would do it that very day); and when her toilet was fairly completed she surveyed herself with much satisfaction in the cracked looking-glass. She really did look very nice, there was no mistake about it; the only thing she seemed to want was a ribbon for her neck, and she began to consider whether it would not be possible to indulge in such a piece of extravagance. But sundry calculations of the money allowed her for boots, gloves, &c., soon proved that this was out of the question; she had only just enough to carry her through the quarter, with one shilling left over, which she meant to spend on a little tea for an old woman she knew. The new ribbon must be given up therefore. But, after all, it did not matter very much, she would get a few flowers instead; so she went to the garden and gathering a moss-rose bud and one or two green leaves, she fastened them in the top of her dress in the place of a brooch. At the foot of the stairs, on her return, she came upon Percy.

'Good morning, sir,' she said, making him a curtsey, 'How do I look to-day? Am I nice, tidy, improved? Look at me, please, and tell me what you think of me. Do I want anything else?'

He put up his glass and surveyed her from head to foot.

'I never saw anyone look better, Lisa, he said, gravely; 'you are perfect.'

Her laugh was a very merry one. 'Perfect! In a cotton dress! Oh, Percy! I'm afraid your taste is not very perfect if you can say such a thing as that. I might have something twenty times prettier, I'm quite sure.'

'Might you? Ah, yes, perhaps so;' in rather an absent tone. 'But I was not thinking of your dress exactly.'

'Not thinking of my dress! And when I asked you particularly to look at it! Why, Percy, what are you talking about?' And she made a pretence of pouting a little. 'What *are* you thinking of then? Oh, I know; of your "something" that you told me of yesterday. Ah, well, the best way will be to leave you to yourself, and then you can think of it as much as you please. I beg your pardon for interrupting you at all. Good bye.'

'Lisa has gone into the other extreme now,' was Isabel's remark, when the change in her cousin's dress was first noticed and commented on. 'From untidiness she has gone off into coquettishness. Who has put that into her head, I wonder! I hope it's not your doing, Percy; for I notice she pays more attention to what you say to her, than she does to anybody else.'

'Does she?' And the change in her brother's face did not escape Isabel's quick eye. 'But what is the

matter with her dress now? I thought I had never seen her look better than she did at breakfast.'

'No; and she knew it too. I felt quite sorry I had ever said a word to her about being careless and untidy; I would rather she had remained so all her life than see her vain and giddy, as she is sure to be, if she goes on as she is beginning now. We want no more vanity and frivolity in our family; we know the consequences of it only too well.'

Percy's brow clouded. 'I don't think you know what you are talking about, Isabel. One might as well associate such thoughts with the child just born as with Lisa. She is as innocent and guileless as girl can be, and without a spark of anything vain and frivolous in her.'

'Perhaps so—at present,' Isabel answered, pointedly; 'but she is like her mother—too like; in face and manner, and many other things. I should be sorry to trust the happiness of anyone I cared for to her keeping.'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HAZELDEAN WOODS.

THURSDAY, the day of the picnic came, and a glorious day it was; fine enough to satisfy even Lisa, who during the whole of the week had been anxiously consulting the glass, and who at a very early hour that morning was up and out in the garden, to investigate the appearance of the sky and make quite sure that the wind was in the right quarter. But even she could see no cause to fear any change in the lovely weather which had lately set in; and although there was a good deal of mist about, and the sky wore rather a grey and sombre look, she knew that these were tokens of heat, not of rain, and that they would pass away as the day advanced. And so they did; and between nine and ten o'clock the shadowy clouds of the early morning had disappeared, and the sun had come out in such splendour that, the only apprehension felt by anyone was lest it should be too hot for enjoyment. But Lisa had no such forebodings. Once satisfied that there was no fear of rain, she had no other misgivings, and was convinced that everything would be delightful;

and when the carriages came to the door at eleven, her spirits were at a pitch far beyond the reach of all petty annoyances and discomforts. Not even the dust and heat of the long drive, nor a back seat opposite her aunt in a barouche, instead of going with Percy as she had hoped, in their own little carriage, could at all affect them; and although she had no one to speak to, and hardly dared to move for fear of attracting Mrs. Tennent's attention, she contrived to amuse herself so well with her own observations on everything they passed, and in anticipation of coming pleasure, that her face was the brightest and most joyous-looking of all the party that met at last, in what had once been the court-yard of Hazeldean Castle.

A very large party they were when they were all assembled. She did not know a quarter of them, and would have felt utterly bewildered by the number of strange faces around her, had not Percy, who had got there before their carriage, been on the look out for her, and when she was standing almost lost in the confusion of meetings and greetings that were taking place, came up to her great delight and took her under his protection. She was quite happy then; and while everybody else was comparing notes on the hot and dusty roads, the want of a breeze, and all other grievances incidental to such occasions; and while the ladies were shaking out their dresses and otherwise recovering from the effects of the drive, she could sit

down with him to look at, and admire the old walls round her, and hear what he had to tell her of their history and of what there was remarkable about them. Very interesting it was; and very much she liked to listen to it all, while sitting on the spot where much of what he told her, had taken place, and where she could almost fancy herself back in the old times of which he was speaking. She was quite sorry when the rest of the party, having finished their remarks on the disagreeables of the drive, and talked themselves into good-humour again, began to look about them, and suggestions of an exploring expedition, and of mounting to the top of one of the towers were set on foot. The elder ladies and gentlemen declined having anything to do with this part of the day's entertainment, preferring to carry on their researches in the lower part of the building, but the proposal seemed to find great favour among the younger members of the party, and nearly all of them prepared to carry it out at once, receiving strict injunctions as they went off, to be sure and get back in time for dinner, which was to be ready at half-past two exactly. Large as the numbers were, however, who began the scramble to the top of the old castle, there were not many who really accomplished it. One by one the ladies discovered that the difficulties of the ascent were too great to be surmounted; and as these difficulties increased the higher they went, they and their several escorts dropped off by degrees, either sitting down

where they gave up the attempt, or else returning at once to find safer and easier places to explore. Only a venturesome few gained the summit at last, and of these Lisa was one; being the first, indeed, to set her foot on the highest point to be reached, and as she did so, she burst into exclamations of wonder and delight at the prospect that lay before her.

It was said that five counties were to be seen from the turrets of Hazeldean Castle; and certainly in the extensive view that stretched away in the dim distance, it was not difficult to believe that this was the case; but it was the landscape nearer at hand that most attracted the attention, so beautiful did it look in the light of that glorious summer's day. Hill and valley, green woods heavy with their July foliage, sparkling streams that wound their way like silver threads through far-off meadows, sunny corn-fields, and sloping pasture-lands, all lay basking in the soft misty haze of noonday, while the blue sky above them, dark in the intensity of its unfathomable depths, was unstreaked by a single cloud. When her first burst of surprise and delight was over, Lisa had not a word to say; she could only stand and look with feelings that took away the power of speaking; and Percy, who was standing by her side, saw the tears gathering in her eyes, though she smiled and blushed a little, when she found he had noticed them.

'I can't help it,' she said, in a low voice, 'beautiful things always make me cry; it is very silly and I don't

know why it is.' She gave a long sigh, 'I never could have fancied anything half as lovely as this.'

He smiled, but made no answer; and they stood together in silence, while a very animated discussion was going on between the others, most of whom had been there several times before, and who had not much attention to bestow on the nearer view which was so familiar to them. They were more intent upon looking out for certain distant spires and other landmarks by which the different counties might be distinguished; and there was a good deal of grumbling at the 'misty light of the day,' and 'that provoking haze,' which prevented their seeing objects that ought to have been visible. A large amount of dissatisfaction, indeed, seemed to prevail among the party, and several of them declared they would never have come up at all had they known they should be so little rewarded for their trouble. It was evident the day had used them very badly, and as the heat was oppressive, it was soon agreed that the best thing they could do, would be to get down again as fast as possible.

'Very stupid, this,' said Cunninghame Thorpe, coming up to Lisa and speaking in an injured tone. 'I had no idea we shouldn't see more or I should never have come up at all. By Jove, what a pull! And for nothing, too! One might just as well have stayed at the bottom for what there is to look at. I wonder who invented these turret-scaling pilgrimages.

Confounded nuisance he must have been in his day, whoever he was—wanted something to do, I should think, and so set his wits to work to find out a way of boring people. We'd much better have been sitting in the court.' He seated himself on the parapet as he spoke, and looked down rather dolefully, as if taking in with his eye all the toils and pains of descent, while Lisa regarded him with some amusement, not quite unmixed with scorn.

'What a pity you didn't stay there, as you would have enjoyed it so much more than climbing up here,' she remarked; 'I wonder you didn't send some one first to ascertain whether the view were worth looking at before you ventured so far yourself; it would have saved you so much fatigue. For my own part, though, I wouldn't have missed coming for anything; it's far more beautiful than I could ever have imagined.' And her eye went back to that summer scene as if she could never tire of gazing at it.

Cunninghame looked at her for a moment or two, as if not quite sure whether she were in earnest or not.

'You have never been abroad, have you?' he asked, then, 'No? ah, I thought not; you wouldn't think much of this kind of scenery if you had.'

'Then I am very glad I never have!'

'But why?' asked Mary, who was standing by, 'why shouldn't we care for this if we had been abroad? I should think that seeing foreign scenery, however grand

or beautiful it may be, would only make one appreciate all the more, quiet home beauty like this. I don't know why we are to despise it, because it bears no resemblance to a Swiss or Italian view.'

'Oh, no, certainly not; it's all very well in its way; but,' with a half-suppressed yawn, 'when one becomes accustomed to the grand and sublime, as is the case abroad, one is apt to find this kind of scenery rather tame in comparison. I don't fancy you would meet with many people to care for it who had been among the Alps or Pyrenees.'

'Do you think so?' said Mary. 'But if that is the case, and travelling makes people dissatisfied with their own country, they had better not leave it. I should have thought myself, though, that it was just the contrary. Beauty is beauty wherever it is, and however different it may be in kind; and when the eye and the taste have been cultivated as they ought to be by travelling, one would think they would be all the quicker to find it out even in common scenes, and where it might be passed over perhaps, by those who have never been trained to look for it.'

'Perhaps so. I dare say you are right,' said Cunninghame, deferentially. 'There is no doubt, at any rate, that is the effect travelling ought to have upon one—although whether it always has is another thing. I am afraid the experience of people in general, would go against your argument. However, I suppose we are

going down now, are we not? unless anyone has any particular fancy for being baked alive up here. Miss Tennent, allow me to go first and help you down those steps, they are not safe by any means. I think if one is obliged to mount these kind of places, they ought, at any rate, to be kept in repair; but I'm afraid Lord Dyneworth don't hold himself responsible for the necks that may be broken on his property. Miss Kennedy, your dress is caught on that stone; oh, Captain Tennent is taking care of you, is he? Well, nobody will ever catch me coming up here again, that's certain; I've been in a good many dark holes and odd places in my life, but never in such a corkscrew as this, and no one will find me trying it a second time. I should like to know how many accidents happen here in a year.'

No accident took place now, however, in spite of Mr. Thorpe's evident anticipations of some such untoward event, and the descent was accomplished in perfect safety by everybody. Dinner was the next thing to be thought of, and that affair also went off very satisfactorily; being, indeed, to judge from appearances, far more appreciated by the company in general, than their scrambling expedition before had been; while Lisa, much as she had enjoyed that, thought that nothing could be more delightful than dining under the shade of the trees, with the long grass waving round them, and the little brook that rushed at their feet dancing in the sunshine. It was everything she had

expected, only still more pleasant; the single drawback to it all being that she saw nothing of Percy; Mr. Thorpe having taken Elinor and herself under his care, and her cousin being engaged with someone else. But when dinner was over at last, and everybody had sat and talked as long as they liked, and parties were afterwards forming for walking or amusing themselves, he came up to her.

'You would like to see something of the woods, Lisa, wouldn't you? Will you go to the dripping well?'

'Yes, oh, yes; I should like it exceedingly,' she said, springing up joyfully. It was one of the principal places to be visited at Hazeldean, and she had often heard of it. She would like to have started at once, but it appeared that Isabel and some others wished to go also, and as Percy knew more about the road than anyone else, they were obliged to wait while several young ladies were coming to a decision as to whether they would accompany them or not. Most of them, however, settled that the distance was too great, and the party was reduced at length to themselves, Janet, Isabel, Elinor, and two friends of the latter of the name of Fraser, merry, good-natured sort of girls, who had sat near Lisa at dinner, and had half-amused, half-puzzled her by the nonsense they talked, and the bantering conversation they had carried on with Mr. Thorpe whenever they could get his attention. A great deal of what they had said had been utterly unintelligible to her,

but she had been entertained even when she could not understand the drift of their speeches; and as they had talked to her also, and seemed disposed to be very sociable, she was not inclined to dislike them. Cunninghame and some other gentleman made up the party, and after considerable delay they all set out; Percy and herself, however, getting on so much faster than any of the others, that they were soon very far in advance of them all; and when they came to a turn in the road which brought them out again on the edge of the stream at some distance from the place where they had dined, she made a pause.

'We had better wait for them, hadn't we?' she said. 'Look how far they are behind. We are walking too quickly for them; they will lose their way altogether if we get out of sight.'

'They can't go wrong when they are once here,' Percy remarked; clearing the brook himself and then helping her to cross the slippery stones which were laid down in the middle of it. 'When they are in the right path on this side we can get on as fast as we like; and as I know you don't mind a little rough walking, I'll take you by a short cut, which will be much pleasanter than the straight road. What do you say? Shall we try it?'

'Yes, if you like, I don't mind any amount of scrambling. It's not so fatiguing to me as it is to Mr. Thorpe,' she said, with a laugh. '"By Jove, what a

pull, and all for nothing!"' imitating his tones. 'Poor fellow! I pity him for finding things such a trouble, he must lose a great deal of pleasure. I think, though, if we are going to have much scrambling, I had better fasten up my dress, by way of being very prudent; you wouldn't like to see me dancing in shreds and tatters this evening. And I can't change it, you know.'

'No; and I should be very sorry for you to do so if you could. I thought you told me the other day you had nothing pretty to wear, but that is pretty enough for anything. I never saw anybody look better dressed than you do now, Lisa.'

She smiled. 'I am very glad you think so; for I took a great deal of trouble this morning to make myself look nice. I knew you would like it, and I wished so much to please you; to-day particularly, for if it hadn't been for you I shouldn't have had this pleasure; and a very great pleasure it is, you can't guess how much I am enjoying it.'

'Can't I?' said Percy, looking at her very bright face and sparkling eyes; and then, as she finished fastening up her dress, they began to saunter slowly on, until they saw that the others had crossed the stream and had fairly started in the right path, when they left the road and, striking off into the deep recesses of the wood, made their way back to the brook. Following its windings, sometimes on the high ground above its banks, and sometimes on the very brink of its waters,

they wandered on under the tall trees and through shady glades, where the grass grew high, and the fern and the foxglove flourished in abundance; and where Lisa almost went wild with the secluded, luxuriant loveliness of all around. She ran about, uttering exclamations of delight and wonder, as each turn revealed some fresh beauty to her admiring gaze, and every step showed some flower or plant she had never met with before. The only drawback to her pleasure was that Mary was not there to share it with her.

'What a pity she is not with us! How I wish she had come!' she exclaimed, when, tired at last, she stopped for a moment, to rest and recover her breath. 'But we can take back some of these flowers for her, at any rate; she will be so pleased with them. And—oh, Percy, do get me some of that beautiful blue flower growing down there in the water. What can it be? The true forget-me-not, I do believe. How lovely it is!'

The true forget-me-not it turned out to be; and Percy, who had been for some time making a selection of the prettiest flowers he could find, proceeded to mix some of it with them, and then arranging them all with the greatest care, he made them up into a bouquet which, for taste and beauty, if not for richness of colour and perfume, might have rivalled any garden blossoms.

[redacted]re it is, Lisa,' he said, as he put the finishing

touch to it. 'You like wild flowers, I know. Will it be good enough for this evening, do you think, as you can't get another?'

'Good enough! It is beautiful. How well you have arranged them. I don't think I should care half so much for any garden bouquet. But, Percy, I must not be the only lady with one this evening, I shouldn't like that. Can't we make another for Mary? I have plenty of flowers here, and if you will get me some of that pretty green you have put with mine, we shall have one all ready for her. She will like it so much.'

Percy did as he was asked; and when Lisa, with great glee, had made up another bouquet for her cousin, they resumed their walk, and after some more scrambling came out at last upon some rising ground not far from the spot they had come to see, and overlooking the path by which the rest of the party must arrive. They decided to wait there for them, and as there were no signs of their approach, and a fallen tree which was near offered a convenient seat, they sat down, not sorry to rest a little after their long walk. It was perhaps, one of the most beautiful places they could have chosen for the purpose, on the summit of a knoll above the stream whose banks they had followed, and whose waters bubbled and danced below in alternate light and shade, till they went wandering off into the depths of the woods beyond. Behind them rose high rocks whose recesses were tapestried in luxuriance with

lichens and pale green feathery ferns, and over their heads the ash-tree and the beech mingled their branches together, and shut out the scorching rays of the afternoon sun. Here and there, however, there came down a bright beam or two on the long grass and the tangled brushwood; and through the heavy foliage an occasional glimpse might be caught of the deep azure sky above; but these were simply reminders of the outer world, and only served to bring out more fully the cool shade and lonely loveliness of the spot on which they looked. Some few insects hovered where the sunlight fell, and now and then a bee murmured past; but the woods were very still, for the birds were sheltering from the heat, and even the topmost leaves of the trees drooped idly, for there was no wind to stir them. The breezes had strayed away that day, and silence and rest seemed to have settled on everything. Lisa herself, too, sat very silent and still, looking first at the scene around her, and then listening to the description which Percy was giving her of the forests of Jamaica where he had once been, and of which these home-woods seemed to have brought back some remembrance. She could see it all in imagination while she listened—the grand old trees with trunks like massive columns; the light that came down, soft and green, through their leafy arches; the festoons of trailing creepers drooping from their boughs; and the solemn gloom that brooded over all. In fancy she walked among them, and felt the warm, damp

air steaming up from the moist ground beneath her feet; and saw the tall ferns waving round her in thousands and myriads. And in fancy, after long wanderings through the forest, she emerged from its shadows and trod more open ground, brilliant with flowers of gorgeous colours, and alive with butterflies and insects more gorgeous still; while, all about her, among the purple blossoms and the bright green leaves, black and golden humming-birds were flitting in countless numbers. Or she went higher still, and heard in lonely wilds the 'Miserere' chanted in sweet unearthly tones by the *solitaire*, and watched the yellow light glitter on untrod mountain peaks and on the distant sea. She sat wrapt in a sort of trance as those far-off scenes rose one by one before her in all the splendour of their tropical beauty—beauty of which she might have read a hundred times, and never once have realised it as she did now, while listening to the glowing words with which, when Percy warmed with his subject, he well knew how to clothe his descriptions. And when he paused at length —when the charm was broken and there was silence again, she almost started to find herself so far away in reality from the mountains and forests where in fancy she had been wandering; sitting instead in an English wood, with English wild flowers and English trees around her, and, in place of the purple ocean in the distance, a little babbling brook at her feet, with green banks above it and low shrubs dipping into its waters.

Percy, who had been watching her while he was speaking, smiled now at the expression of her face; it told so plainly of a return from the world of imagination, and her look was like that of a person just awaking from a dream.

'What are you thinking of, Lisa?' he asked at last, finding that she said nothing.

'Thinking of? Of what you were telling me—of those places and how very beautiful they must be. I was half wishing I could see them all.'

'Half wishing? Not quite, then?'

'No, not quite. I hadn't made up my mind exactly whether I should like to see them or not. I was thinking that if what Mr. Thorpe says is true, and people who see other countries don't care for English scenery, perhaps it would be better for me to stay at home. I should be so sorry not to care for things that I do now; for such a place as this, for instance. How exquisitely lovely it is here! though it is so different from what you have been describing; and if I thought there would ever come a time when it would not look beautiful to me, I should wish never to go abroad. But I don't think it can always be so; I don't think that what he says can be true with everybody. You, Percy, for one, it is not true with you, is it? I'm sure it's not, indeed; for I know you find many places quite as pretty as I do; and when you used to take me for those long drives in the spring, you often stopped to show me some view or

some little bit of wood or hill that you thought beautiful. You don't despise England, I am sure, because we have nothing so grand here as in many countries.'

He smiled. 'No, indeed, I don't. But I am of Mary's opinion, that beauty is beauty wherever it is, and that it may be of very different kinds. I am not sure, too, that I don't sometimes prefer the "tame," homely beauty of an English wood like this, to the most magnificent forests and mountains in the world. At the present moment I do most certainly—there is no place I should care to be in so much as this—unless, indeed——'

'Unless what?' Lisa asked, as he stopped abruptly. But he did not go on, and she did not notice the strangely wistful look with which he was regarding her. She was playing with her flowers, and hardly seemed to observe that her question was not answered.

'You have no particular wish, then, to go abroad?' he said, after a pause. 'But would you dislike the thoughts of it very much, Lisa, if you ever had to do so; if anything should happen—any circumstances ever oblige you to go?' he spoke, hurriedly. 'Would you mind it very much? Would it be very hard for you to leave England?'

Lisa looked up in some surprise, but it was more at the tone in which this was said than at the words themselves.

'I don't know. But why—why do you ask? I

shall never have to go, shall I? unless—yes, I had forgotten that—perhaps, when I am a governess I may be obliged to do so; that was what you meant, was it? Oh, I shouldn't like it at all then; I should be so far away from the Priory—from you and Mary, and everybody I care for; it would make me miserable to go: I hope I never shall.'

'No, indeed, I hope so, too. I trust you will never have to go in that way, Lisa; but I did not mean that. You might go with some one you cared for—some one who cared for you—would that make a difference? Would you dislike going then?'

Lisa looked at him. 'No, I don't think I should; I don't believe I should mind where I went with anyone I cared for. But—ah, that is the worst of being a governess: you can't be with the people you care for; you must live away from them; you must live instead with people who are nothing to you, and whom perhaps you don't like. It is very hard; I never knew till lately how hard it must be; because I never felt before how much the Priory is like a home to me. That has been your doing, Percy; it is you who have made it so, for it has been quite a different place since you came, and it will be very different to me again when you go; it won't be the same without you.' There was something of sadness in her tone.

'Well, you are not going to get rid of me just yet, Lisa,' he answered, lightly, and yet as if it were an effort to him to speak. 'I stay till October, now, you know.'

'Yes, and I am very glad. And—' brightening up a little, 'when do you go?—perhaps you won't have to leave England; not just yet, at any rate. You are not likely to be sent out to India again, and I hope there will be no war anywhere else. I don't like fighting now; I didn't mind it at one time; indeed, I rather liked it then, I think. I liked to hear of the battles and the glory, and everything else that we were proud of; but I don't now, and I wish there was nothing of the sort. I can't bear it.'

'What, not the glory, Lisa?' he said, with a half laugh. 'You, who become so excited when you read of heroic deeds, and who look as if you were ready to march to battle yourself, when you hear stirring music; you to say that you don't care for glory! That must be a mistake, I am sure.'

'No, it isn't. I like glory very much when it has been got; and I like to hear of brave things that have been done when I know the danger is over; but I don't like to hear of them when some one I care for is in the midst of it all; and that would always be the case now, you know, if you ever went out where there was any fighting. I shouldn't think of honour or glory then; I should only be thinking of you.'

Percy was silent. He rose suddenly and stood for a moment as if irresolute; and then, as she got up too, believing that he had seen the others coming, he turned to her in ill-disguised agitation.

'It's no use, Lisa, I can't let it go on. I must tell you, and if—' He paused, for she was looking at him with such evident astonishment, with such utter absence of all consciousness of what might be coming, that his resolution almost failed him. He, Percy Tennent, who had faced death in a hundred forms on the battle-field, who had marched up to the cannon's mouth, and not known what fear was—he felt his courage going when about to say a few words to his little cousin—a child, as many called her, and as she almost was in years; but to him she was a woman, and, in all the world, the first and the dearest; and he trembled to think of all the happiness or misery that must be staked on the answer to those few words. He hesitated whether to risk so much then, when it was plain, from her very freedom from embarrassment, she had no suspicion of his real feelings towards her. He felt he would have given anything at that moment to see her blush, or show any sign of confusion. But she did not: her eye met his with the same clear confiding gaze with which she always looked at him; and the expression uppermost in her face was that of simple surprise—surprise, at first, at his unwonted agitation of manner, and then at his hesitation.

'What is it?' she said at last, finding that he was still silent, 'what must you tell me?' and her tone became a little uneasy.

'Nothing to frighten you,' he said. 'No, Lisa, I only

hesitated because I don't know that I have any right to ask what I wish; I am not at all sure how you—' he paused again, for just then voices were heard close at hand, and figures were seen approaching through the trees. 'Ah, well, it's too late now;' and whether he felt most vexed or relieved at the interruption, he could hardly have told. 'I ought to have spoken sooner, but it can't be helped; I must tell you another time.'

Lisa looked at him. 'It is something bad, Percy, I am sure it is. I can see it in your face. It is something you don't like.'

He half smiled. 'It will depend upon you, Lisa, whether it is good or bad for me,' he said, hastily, beginning to walk on.

'On me!' she exclaimed, in the utmost astonishment; but she had no time to ask any more questions, for the others had emerged now from among the trees, and were ascending the slope; and no sooner were they within speaking distance, than a host of enquiries began as to how long the two had been there, which way they had come, and what they had been doing—enquiries which Lisa had to answer, for Percy scarcely seemed to hear what was passing, and was very silent and preoccupied; a circumstance which was not long unremarked by some of the party.

'And so you came by a short cut?' said Kate Fraser, turning to Lisa with a little laugh; 'I suppose you had a very pleasant walk?'

'Yes, very pleasant; delightful it was. We came by the brook; and you have no idea how pretty it is down there, close to the water.'

'Is it? I almost wonder, then, that you did not ask us to go with you. You should have given us all a general invitation to accompany you, instead of going off alone with Captain Tennent; it would have been much kinder, wouldn't it, Martha?' looking with a smile at her sister, who, from some cause or other, appeared to have great difficulty in keeping her merriment within due bounds.

'Nonsense, Kate; how could you expect it? Miss Kennedy didn't mean to be rude, I am sure—but when people are in p'easant company they don't remember those kind of things. And I dare say Captain Tennent can be very agreeable when he likes—of course he is not always so grave and so very silent as he is just now,' with a glance at Percy.

There was no answer to this from Lisa: she did not at all understand what amused them so much; but she saw that the joke, whatever it was, was at her expense, and she felt rather inclined to be vexed. She was a little conscience-stricken, too, at remembering how completely she had forgotten everybody else during her ramble with her cousin, and her looks betrayed some confusion.

Kate laughed again as she watched her for a minute, and then perhaps seeing that she was really distressed,

turned her attention to her flowers and began to admire them in very lavish terms.

'But how did you manage to get so many? We hardly saw any as we came along, and I am so fond of flowers! I wish you would give me a few of yours; you have such a number, you will never miss them.'

'Oh yes, as many as you like,' Lisa began, eagerly, but stopping suddenly as she was about to undo them. 'At least—I forgot. I'm very sorry—but—I didn't get them myself, and——'

'And you would rather not give them away. Of course not.' Kate's eyes were brimming over with amusement. 'I am sure I beg your pardon for asking for them. I didn't think what I was saying. But I wouldn't have them on any account now, it would be such a pity to disturb them, they look so pretty as they are. Captain Tennent got them for you, I suppose?'

'Yes, and he took so much trouble to arrange them, that I don't like to—I mean—you should have them directly if I had got them myself, but——.'

'My dear, I quite understand. You needn't trouble yourself to make excuses, they are not at all necessary. I know exactly how it is; and moreover, if you were ever so willing to give them, I don't suppose he would be particularly pleased to see me with them. No, thank you, I really don't care about them. I am only sorry I asked for them at all.'

And with another glance at her sister, and at Isabel,

who was standing by, she walked off, leaving Lisa looking at her flowers in no very comfortable frame of mind, although why she felt so much annoyed, she hardly knew. She had not much time, however, to indulge in unpleasant reflections, for there was a general move again. The dripping-well was only a few minutes' walk from the place where they then were, and everyone was anxious to get to it.

CHAPTER XV.

'SHE WAS A WOMAN NOW.'

THE party were just starting, when Janet Darrell, to whom Isabel had been saying something, came up to Lisa and put her arm in hers.

'Will you walk with me, Lisa?' she said, drawing her back a little. 'I've hardly seen you all day, and I want to speak to you particularly.'

Lisa was rather surprised, but she had no objection to make, and they set out together, Janet walking slowly, but saying nothing until the others were out of hearing. Then she turned round with a smile.

'You won't be offended with me, will you, if you shouldn't happen to like what I am going to say?'

'Offended!' Lisa's tone was a little uneasy. She began to wonder what was coming—something unpleasant, of course. She had noticed the exchange of words between her cousin and Janet, and connecting that circumstance with what she was now to hear, she concluded immediately that she was to be found fault with. She did not like the prospect, and her face betrayed pretty clearly what was passing in her mind.

'You must not think me officious, meddling, or anything of that kind,' Janet went on, still looking at her. 'If you were anyone else—if you were not half so much of a child as you are—I should not think of saying a word to you. I should suppose then you knew what you were about, and didn't want anyone to interfere with you. But it's because I am sure you don't know what you are doing, and don't understand how much people may remark upon things that you think nothing of, that I wish to put you on your guard. You don't want to get talked about, I am quite certain.'

Lisa looked bewildered. 'I don't know what you mean. Get talked about! Who is to talk of me? What have I done?'

Janet smiled a little. 'Nothing very bad yet, my dear. I told you I was only wishing to give you a warning.' And then, changing her tone: 'Why didn't you keep with us as we were coming here, instead of walking off alone with Captain Tennent?'

'Why?' in great astonishment: 'I don't know. We got on before you, and he asked me to go the short way with him, that was all. Why, oughtn't I to have done it? Was there any harm in it?'

'No harm exactly, but I think it would have been better if you had stayed with us;' and then, seeing that Lisa still looked perplexed: 'Pray, what relation is he to you, my dear?'

'What relation? Why, Mrs. Darrell, you know, he's my cousin. What makes you ask?'

'Only because you treat him as if he were something much nearer.'

'Do I?' said Lisa, slowly, as if considering. 'But, yes, I suppose I do. I don't see how I can help it. I have no brother of my own, but he is just as good as one to me.'

'Perhaps so; but, my dear, if you choose to consider him in that light, other people don't forget that he is only a cousin; and, excuse me—but I think a little more reserve on your part with him would be better.'

'A little more reserve? But why? Why am I to be reserved with him? He wouldn't like it. What has he done?'

'My dear Lisa, don't be so innocent. Really, if I didn't know you, I should say you were pretending to misunderstand me. You are not such a child as not to see that you can't be so free and easy with him without attracting attention. In short, if you must have it out plainly, there is such a thing as cousins falling in love.'

Lisa was silent; but it was not because she misunderstood now. Her face and neck were crimson in a moment.

'You must not be angry with me,' Janet went on; 'I didn't mean to hurt your feelings in any way, or make you uncomfortable. I only intended to give you a hint, that you may take care what you are doing. Unless, indeed, he has ever said anything to——'

'He has never said a word to me about such a thing; never, never, never!' Lisa exclaimed, in the utmost distress. 'How can you talk in that way, Mrs. Darrell? He never has.'

'My dear, you needn't be so vehement. I didn't say there would be any harm if he had; I was only going to say that if you and he understand each other, that would make a difference. But if, as you say, you are nothing more than cousins, I think it would be quite as well if you were only to treat him as one. If you really were still a child, of course no one would think anything of your being so much with him and talking to him as you do; but as you are not that, as everybody else is beginning to think you a woman, you can't do such things without exciting remark. You heard what the Frasers said just now; and they are not the only people to-day who have——'

'You needn't go on, Mrs. Darrell,' Lisa said, in a choked voice. 'You needn't tell me any more. I know what you mean; I hadn't thought of it before.' She tried to speak quietly, but her words came out with difficulty, and the burning colour in her face grew deeper and deeper.

Janet saw her confusion, but she took no notice of it; and perhaps thinking she had said enough, she walked on in silence, and not another word was spoken by either until they reached the dripping-well,

when Lisa disengaged herself from her and joined her cousin Elinor. Her heightened colour and disturbed appearance would most certainly then have attracted attention, had not everyone, fortunately for her, had their thoughts fully occupied with other things. They were all too busy, talking and admiring, to look at her; but wild and beautiful as the scenery was about them, and much as she had always longed to see it, it was completely lost upon her now. Rocks, woods, and water, all lay before her in romantic loveliness; but if anyone had asked her what she saw, she could not have told them, for wherever she went she found Percy at her side, and what before would have seemed only right and natural, was now the one thing she most dreaded, and to avoid him had become her engrossing idea. She was afraid to look at, almost even to speak to him, and not thinking that such a sudden change was the most likely way to make herself remarked, she grew stiff and constrained, and gave such short answers to everything he said, that he looked at her at last in astonishment, being quite unable to conjecture the cause of this alteration in her manner. She was glad when Mr. Thorpe, who had before been monopolised by the Frasers, came up to point something out to her, and thinking anything better than these miserable attempts to appear unconcerned and indifferent with her cousin, she gave her new companion so much encouragement that he seemed very little inclined to

leave her again. He walked back to the castle with her and Elinor, and she saw nothing more of Percy either during their return or for some time afterwards. There was a surprise, however, awaiting them when they got back to the place where they had dined, and where the elders of the party were still sitting. Two gentlemen were there—strangers at first Lisa thought them, until upon hearing voices behind them, they turned, and then she discovered that one of them was no other than Arthur Darrell. With an exclamation of joy she sprang forward to meet him.

'Scaramouch, I declare!' was his greeting, with an exaggerated expression of her surprise. 'But,' surveying her from head to foot, 'Scaramouch no longer. Well, I never should have believed it! Lisa Kennedy in a whole dress and looking like the rest of the world! What a transformation!' He stood lost in affected astonishment.

'Nonsense, Arthur,' she said, in some confusion and colouring deeply; 'how can you be so ridiculous! But how did you get here, and when did you come? We never expected you; why didn't you write to tell us, and how long have you been here?'

'What a string of questions! I should like to know which I'm to answer first. If you wish to know, though, why we came without giving due notice, you must ask the supreme power there,' looking at his brother. 'I can give no reason for it, seeing I have not heard any.

All I can tell you is, that I was fast asleep on three chairs in the dining-room at Gainsford last night, when he woke me up, and said, "I'm going to Atherstone to-morrow, Arthur." "All right," I said, and went to sleep again, and here we are. That's all I know about it, and quite enough too. I should have had the state of the banking books down upon me if I had asked any questions.'

Lisa laughed a little. 'And they told you at the Priory, I suppose, where we were?'

'Yes, they said you were having a jollification here; so we thought we would come out and see the fun. Ralph, to be sure, had some idea of sitting down in the hall, and going over a few accounts by way of refreshment after his journey, but I walked him off by main force. We took the train to Stoke, and came through the woods. But where are the others? Janet and Isabel, and——' with an odd look—'Le Balafré? By the way, Lisa, how do you get on with him? Have you made his acquaintance yet, or do you still confine yourself to "Yes" and "No" when he speaks to you?'

Lisa tried to laugh, but she did not succeed very well; and it was a happy thing for her, that the arrival of Janet took off Arthur's attention from her very visible embarrassment. She could retire into the background then, and while everyone else talked and laughed, and there was a great deal of surprise and pleasure on the part of all at the unexpected appearance of the two

brothers, she sat silent and downcast, with all the life and joyousness gone from her spirits, and only intent upon keeping out of the way of Percy when he came back at length with the Frasers, who had been tired, and had loitered very much on their return from the woods. It was not a difficult thing to do, for he was too short-sighted to distinguish her at any time unless she were quite close to him, and among so many people it was hardly likely he would make her out if she chose to avoid him. She did not meet him once until after tea, when they were all assembling in the courtyard for dancing, and then she remembered suddenly that she had promised the first two dances to him. The recollection came only just in time, for Mr. Thorpe was asking her, and after him came up Arthur, and three or four others. She was engaged seven or eight deep before she knew what she was about; but the music was beginning, and people were all taking their places, before Percy made his appearance to claim her promise. She rose hurriedly then without a word, and they joined a set that was forming for the opening quadrille.

'You are tired, Lisa,' was his first remark, as they stood together while the other couples were coming up. 'That walk this afternoon was too much for you.'

'Was it? No, I don't think so. I don't feel at all tired.'

Poor Lisa! If she had been a little older she would not have been so foolish; she would have known better

what to do, and how to look and speak naturally whatever she might be feeling: but she had had no practice in the ways of the world, and was a bad dissembler at any time. She was shy and frightened now, and really did not know how to appear at ease; nor could she at all determine how cousins were expected to speak to each other, and what was supposed to be proper for them to do and say. The consequence was that her tones were formal and constrained to the last degree, and matters were not improved by her observing, or fancying she observed, looks of amused intelligence passing between the Frasers, who happened to be in the same set as herself. That Percy was struck by the change in her manner she felt, too, instinctively, although she had not dared to raise her eyes to his face when she spoke, and did not see the strangely hurt and puzzled look with which he was regarding her. But he said nothing, and the first two or three figures of the dance were gone through in silence, and by her with a listless, dispirited step, which was noticed, not only by him, but by everybody near her. Janet, who was not dancing herself, but only standing looking on, overheard the remarks that were made, and came up to her in one of the pauses between the figures.

'For goodness' sake, Lisa,' she whispered, 'don't look so frightened and so dreadfully conscious. Don't you see that everybody is looking at you, and wondering what is the matter? How can you be so silly!'

A speech which was not calculated to restore Lisa to self-possession. She started and coloured deeply, and Percy's next attempt at sociability was not much more successful than the first.

'Where are your flowers, Lisa?' he said. 'Mary has hers, I see. What have you done with yours? Thrown them away?'

She glanced round, and paused for a moment as if trying to recollect. 'No, I put them in water somewhere. But I don't want them. I don't care about them now.'

Not very gracious, as she thought directly after she had said it. But, after all, what did it matter? A few flowers given by a cousin were not of any consequence. They could be nothing to her. There was another long pause, which Percy broke once more by saying with a smile—

'I wonder what is come to us this evening, that we are both so silent. Anyone to see us would say that we had never met before and didn't know what to talk about; or else, that we had quarrelled and didn't wish to speak. But as neither of these is the case, what is the reason? Do you know, for I am sure I don't. I should be quite puzzled to tell why we are so stiff and formal all at once. We are not going to be strangers, are we, Lisa?'

And the tone in which he spoke nearly upset poor Lisa's resolution. The tears rushed to her eyes, and she

was obliged to turn away her head that he might not see them; but while struggling to recover herself and to speak naturally, a glance which she happened to meet from Kate Fraser, brought back all her shyness. She could not answer, and felt only too thankful that the whirl of the concluding galope covered her embarrassment and hesitation, and saved her the necessity of any reply. But when the dance was over, and she would have returned to her seat, Percy detained her.

'Lisa, you have not answered me yet. You are not going away without doing so, are you? What is it makes you so strange to-night? You are not tired, you say; what is it? I have not displeased you in any way, have I?'

Displeased her! How little fear there was of his ever doing such a thing as that she knew then, if she had not known before. But of course she could not tell him so, and, only afraid at the moment of betraying her real feelings, she took refuge in her old defiant manner. She gave a short laugh.

'I am not displeased. I don't know why you should fancy such a thing; unless, indeed, you wish to tell me that I am out of temper because I don't care to talk just now. But I am not obliged to do so, I suppose, if I don't like.'

'Certainly not,' and he drew himself up, and for a moment looked exceedingly proud. 'Certainly not; and I am the last person to force you to do so against

your wish.' But pride gave way again, and his tone changed to one of passionate entreaty. 'For Heaven's sake, Lisa, don't be so cold to me—don't let us quarrel for nothing. What is it I have done? Won't you tell me? don't let some miserable misunderstanding separate us. I have done something—said something that has vexed and annoyed you. Won't you tell me what it is?'

He had caught her hand now, and she trembled from head to foot.

'I am not vexed—not annoyed,' she said, struggling to free herself. 'You have done nothing, but—oh, Percy,' changing her tone, 'Let me go, I don't like it, indeed I don't;' and then in an agony of fear lest they should be observed: 'Let me go, Captain Tennent, you have no right to keep me—no right to make me give reasons for what I do; let me go.'

There was no need, however, for her to repeat her words; he let her hand fall.

'"Captain Tennent!" Oh, Lisa!'

But she did not wait to answer or even to look at him. Her eyes were blinded with tears, and her heart felt ready to burst, as she rushed away; but she did not follow the impulse which would have led her to turn back for one more word. She could not trust herself to do so: the only thing she felt, was to leave him and try to forget what had passed; and if excitement could have helped her to do this, she would have succeeded to her heart's content. She had had doubts once as to

having any partners for the dancing, but she soon found that any fears on that score had been unfounded. She did not sit down the whole evening, and became so bewildered at last, with all her new acquaintance, that she found it impossible to remember one from another, engaging herself two or three times over for the same dances, and making various other mistakes of the kind, which entailed no small trouble upon herself, and some disputing among her partners. But she laughed away unpleasantnesses, and if she had been remarked at the beginning of the evening for her grave looks and want of animation, no one could have said the same of her afterwards. She smiled, and talked, and looked as if she had no thoughts but for the passing pleasures of the moment—as if she were engrossed by them; too much so, indeed, it seemed to Mary, who was often watching her, and who noted with some uneasiness her flushed cheek, bright eye, and restless excitability of manner. She did not guess any more than others how very forced that gaiety was, and what a heavy burden there was lying hidden under all that sparkling merriment. And little enough Percy could guess of it, when from time to time he caught sight of her, or heard her laugh as she passed him. He did not ask her to dance again, but he was standing beside her once in the pause of a waltz, and her eye happened then to meet his. It fell directly, but Cunninghame Thorpe who was dancing with her said something in a low voice, and she

smiled, and looked up again, and with a careless glance at the place where her cousin was standing, she was gone once more. Did she know that that dance was one he particularly disliked? Perhaps not; and yet it was not many days since it had been the subject of discussion at the Priory, and he had declared his aversion to it and to all others of a similar kind, and had been accused in consequence of over-fastidiousness and old-fashioned notions. And she had been present at the time, as he remembered well enough.

The long day came to an end at length. Delightful it had been, and a great success, said nearly everybody. There were only two who thought differently, and they were silent; but though Lisa, for one, said nothing about the pleasure she had had, she talked fast and eagerly about other things, and seemed in no hurry to bring her amusement to a close. She was among the last of the dancers in the courtyard, and when the carriages came round, and her aunt and some other ladies who were to return in the barouche were all seated, she had to be looked for. Mrs. Tennent was by no means pleased at the delay.

'And where is your shawl, child?' she said, when, after some little time, Lisa made her appearance with Mr. Thorpe. 'You can't be driving home at this time of night, with only that thin mantle on. Percy, find her shawl for her; I suppose it was left in the other carriage.'

Lisa started. She had not seen that her cousin was so near her; but he said nothing, and, without looking at her, went off in search of the missing article. Nor did he speak when he returned with it; he put it on, and then placing her in the carriage, he raised his hat to the party there, and was turning away, when Kate Fraser came running up.

'Here, Miss Kennedy, you are leaving your flowers behind you. I found them in a corner of the court-yard in a jug of water, and I know you prize them particularly.' She smiled as she threw them into Lisa's lap. 'It would have been a great pity not to take them; they are so pretty, and not at all withered.'

Lisa's face flushed. 'Not withered, but they are very wet and nasty. I'm sorry you had the trouble of bringing them; they are not worth anything.' She tossed them back again, and turned away with an air of great indifference. They fell on the ground at Percy's feet, and the carriage wheels passed over them and crushed them in the dust. Fit type of his own crushed and fast-fading hopes.

And all the way home Lisa, silent and unnoticed, was crying bitterly. The long drive seemed as if it would never end, and as trees and hedges passed by in slow succession, she could hardly believe that the road was the same by which they had come in the morning, and which had then seemed so short and pleasant. But the welcome lights of Atherstone were seen at last, and

after that, home was soon reached; and then, when everyone else went to the drawing-room and talked of refreshment of some sort before going to bed, she took a candle, and, unheeded, slipped away to her own little closet.

And there she could think. In her solitude there she could go over in thought the whole of the past day, and when all the house was still that night, when she had heard the rest of the party come in, and everybody go at length to their rooms, and when Mary, who slept in the one adjoining hers, had been to say 'good night,' then Lisa, no longer afraid of being seen or heard, sat up in her little bed, and cried as if her heart would break. For she knew it all now; Janet's words that afternoon had opened her eyes, and first made her aware of what, if left to herself, she might have been long in discovering. She knew now all that Percy was to her—all that he had been for so very long, even while she was still ignorant of the state of her feelings towards him. She trembled, indeed, to think what those feelings were—how very, very dearly she loved him. What did it matter that he was plain and silent and grave? or rather, that he was said to be so by others? He was not so to her; he was everything that was perfect in her estimation; and she loved him better, far better, than anyone else in the whole wide world. Her affection for Mary, warm and deep as it was, sank into insignificance when compared with the intensity of

that which she felt for him,—little as she had known or suspected it until within the last few hours. And when she did know it, what had been her first action? She had slighted and quarrelled with him, and all because she had been afraid of her real feelings being discovered. For she saw now what it was that had made Janet's remarks so unwelcome; if there had been no truth in them, if she had felt that Percy really was no more to her than anyone else—unpleasant as she might have thought it to hear such things—she would very likely have soon forgotten what had passed, it would have made but little impression on her.

But this could not be the case now. She had found out what he was to her, and never again could she lose the consciousness of it. Never again could she meet him as she had done; all freedom of intercourse with him was gone, all the many very happy days they had had together were over. Even if she had not already brought about that estrangement between them, things could never have been the same now as before. How could she ever look at or speak to him as she had done? How could she walk and talk with him, and tell him all she thought as in the time when she had never feared his knowing what was passing in her mind? Now she felt as if she could never meet his eye or exchange the commonest words with him without betraying her secret; she fancied even that everyone about her must read it, that all would see the difference that a

few hours had made in her. Yes, for that one short day had changed her completely; she had left that house in the morning, a light-hearted, unthinking child, and she had come back to it in the evening a woman—with all a woman's doubts and fears crowding upon her, and weighing down her spirits. Her days of utter thoughtlessness were gone for ever; and in that little room, on that still summer's night, with the moonbeams shining on the bare floor and whitewashed walls around her, Lisa bade farewell to her vanished childhood. And many and very bitter were the tears that she shed over ts memory.

CHAPTER XVI.

SHALL HE GUESS IT?

NO one who saw Lisa enter the breakfast-room on the following morning could possibly have guessed anything of the thoughts that had kept her awake more than half the night, or have had even one suspicion of the real state of her feelings, and the change that had come over her since she had last met her cousin there. The secret that she had feared might be betrayed to everyone, was hidden safely away under a flighty manner and a petulant air; and although all might have observed the alteration in her (and there were two or three who remarked it at once), they would have been far enough from guessing the real cause of it. Least of all did Percy suspect it. That night had been an even more sleepless one to him than to her, and in its long watches, with all the bitterness of his disappointed hopes upon him, he too had thought over the past day, and in his sad and silent review of it, had seen the downfall of his most prized and cherished wishes. There was but one explanation, as he imagined, of all that was strange in her conduct; and hard as it was to

acknowledge to himself that it must be the true one, he could not in his own mind doubt that it was so. The change had come after their walk together, after that half-begun avowal of his feelings for her; and, all unconscious as she had been at the time, of what he was about to tell her, something, he thought, must afterwards have led her to suspect it, and she wished then to let him know how impossible such a thing was, how utterly wild and chimerical such hopes on his part were. And so, indeed, he felt them now. He had thought so in the darkness and loneliness of the night, and he felt it doubly now, when he met her in the sunny light of the morning, and mentally contrasted his own personal appearance with that of the fair girl who sat opposite to him in all the radiance of her winning loveliness. What could he, with his plain looks and silent uncaptivating manner, have in common with so much of grace and beauty, so much of life and joyousness? Wild indeed had it been ever to dream of such a thing. How was it likely that she would care for him in the way he had hoped and wished she might—for him, so much older, so much graver, so unlike herself in every way? No, it was simply impossible, and he knew it now; and knowing it, he could not blame her for her coldness towards him, or for taking that way of showing that he could never be anything more to her than he had been.

'And perhaps it is better as it is,' he thought; 'I

could not have gone on much longer as we were doing, without telling her what my real feelings were, and it would have been harder to hear her *say* she did not care for me. It is bad enough as it is, but that would have been far worse. And of course I was mad ever to think that such a thing could be. As if it were possible, indeed, for one so young and lovely and winning in every way to care for me. And she cannot guess how much I love her; she cannot know that there is no one who could ever love her better, or have more thought or care for her than I would have had if I could have called her mine. How can she know it? I have never told her so. I have never said one word that could tell her she was any more than a cousin to me. That fellow Thorpe will say more of such things to her in a day, than I should in a year; but will he love her half, or a quarter as well as I do? I don't believe it; I wish I could. I wish I could think that if he wins her he will feel for her one tithe of what I am feeling now; that he will make her half as happy as she deserves to be, or as I would have tried to make her—as I would have made her, indeed. Yes, Lisa, it would have been the happiness of my life to make you happy, and I thought once it might be so. I was mad enough to have some hope, but it's all over now.'

It did, indeed, seem over, for Lisa had hardly a word or a look for him that morning. If she could not see him without the hot blood rushing to her face, or hear

him speak without a strange feeling, such as she had never known before, coming over her, she took care that no one else should have even a suspicion of what was passing in her mind. For all the notice she took of him, she might have been utterly oblivious of his presence, except once or twice, when she chose to be as defiant as in her most wilful days, and her utter carelessness then of what he might like or think was marked in no ordinary degree. Among other topics of discussion at the breakfast-table, was one brought about by a remark of Mr. Thorpe's, that they might, if they chose, get up a carpet-dance at home sometimes. They were a large party, and it would be a pleasant amusement in the evening. The idea was seized at once, and by Arthur in particular.

'A first-rate suggestion! we'll carry it out, by all means. Why we can get up six or eight couples among ourselves, to begin with; and if anybody else drops in, so much the better. What do you say, most respected aunt? Will you give us a corner of the drawing-room to try our paces in? You may sit at the other end, and go on with your work as usual; we shan't disturb you. And, Lisa, you can pay off your debts then. You shirked that last polka with me yesterday, and went off with somebody else. A great shame it was of you!'

Lisa laughed, but it was not very easily. 'I couldn't help it. You didn't come when it was beginning, and of course I couldn't wait for you.'

'Well, remember the first you dance here, then, is to be with me; two, indeed, you ought to give me, to make up for my disappointment last night.'

'Very well, two it shall be, then, if you like. I am so fond of those fast dances. Quadrilles are very stupid after them. I can't think how people can care for them when they can get waltzes and polkas,' with a glance, not at Percy, but towards the place where he sat.

'You didn't seem to think so yesterday. I admired the zeal with which you went through everything in succession. Did you sit down once?'

'No, I don't think so—not in the waltzes, certainly. And I had some capital partners; Mr. Thorpe in particular. I danced with him several times; he waltzes beautifully.'

She forgot as she spoke that Mr. Thorpe was her right-hand neighbour, he having placed himself, as he generally contrived to do, at her side. Had she remembered it, it was, most probably, the last thing she would have said; and she had now to pay the penalty of her thoughtlessness, for Cunninghame turned round with a bow and a smile, and immediately began a conversation which did not seem to be intended for the public in general, it being carried on on his side in a low voice, which became confidential as he proceeded. Lisa's replies were audible enough, but they were chiefly confined to monosyllables, for the spirit which

had prompted her to express herself so warmly on the subject of waltzing, appeared to have evaporated, and although she looked flushed and excited, she was very absent, and hardly seemed to hear what was said to her. Nor did she notice the glances which her aunt cast on her from time to time, and which were not such as to give the idea of her being particularly pleased. Perhaps Mrs. Tennent was beginning to perceive that Mr. Thorpe's attentions to her niece were rather too marked to be consistent with her age and position; and that some of them might be transferred with advantage to her own daughters, who certainly had more right to expect them. Whatever her thoughts were, they had the effect of making her look very grave, and when breakfast was over, she called Lisa, whom Mr. Thorpe seemed very anxious to detain, and sent her away at once to her usual morning's work, in a manner which indicated plainly enough that she had cause for displeasure. But Lisa did not see it as she would have done at another time. She was too busy now with other thoughts, and she went to Mary's room and began her studies without a passing misgiving as to what might have vexed her aunt, or even observing that she was displeased at all. She sat down with her books before her, but French and German were drier and more distasteful than ever that morning, and she found it impossible to give her attention to what she was doing. She was thinking of her cousin instead;

wondering what he was thinking of her, and of her strange conduct; and she thought and thought of this one thing until her head ached, and she grew dizzy and confused, while her fingers were tired with turning over the dictionary in search of words of which her mind refused to take in the sense. It was hot, too; very hot. The sultry air came in at the open windows, heavy and oppressive; and the glare of light even through the curtain of shadowing lime-trees was overpowering. And before her eyes all the time there was a vision of green woods and tall grass and bracken, and in her ears the cool sound of a rippling stream. And in fancy she was sitting again where she had sat the day before, with Percy at her side. It was a pleasure which, it seemed to her, she had then only half appreciated; now she would have given anything to recal it and to bring back that short half-hour—the wind-up of so much happiness. With a very weary sigh at last, she pushed her books away from her.

'It's no use, Mary. I can't do anything. It's all waste of time trying. I hate these things to-day,' —very fiercely—'you must let me go.' The 'must' in a tone of command, while her feet were almost dancing on the floor in her haste to rush away.

Mary looked up in surprise from the lesson which Constance was repeating. She had noticed Lisa's excitability all the morning, and was vexed to see it,

for she could guess nothing, of course, of the feelings uppermost in her mind; and was sorry to think that she had so little command over herself as to be so easily upset by a day's pleasure. She did not give the desired permission, and only looked a little grave. 'Indeed, dear Lisa, I don't think you know what you are saying. It seems to me that you ought to do more to-day, instead of less. You are not like a child, and unable to give your thoughts to what you are doing. I am sure you can attend if you wish, and you know you have to make up for lost time. You had better sit down again and finish that translation.'

'But I can't; it's quite impossible. I've tried, and I can't do it. It's very stupid of you, Mary, very unkind to keep me. I can't work and I won't, that's all.'

Poor little Lisa! she was very miserable or she never would have made such a speech as that, and the next minute she was conscience-stricken. She threw her arms round her cousin's neck in a fit of repentance.

'Oh! Mary, please forgive me. I didn't mean it. You are not stupid, not unkind at all. It's only myself. I'm very tired; or it's very hot or something. But won't you let me go? You don't know how my head aches, and if you'll only let me leave off for a little while, I'll come back by-and-bye and go on with everything quite properly—I will, indeed. Please say I may go.'

What was to be done? Mary was not quite sure that she was right in yielding, perhaps it was rather weak, but then Lisa was always more easily led than driven; and she was more likely to do her best afterwards if indulged now, than if compelled to work against her will. So she only said, 'Very well, dear, you may go if you like.' And Lisa kissed her and rushed away to her own room, where she locked the door, and throwing herself down upon the floor by the side of the bed, gave full scope for the time to the tumult of feelings that were oppressing her. Wretched feelings they were; and she sat and stared up at the blue sky between the branches above her window, and wondered why she felt so miserable, and what business everything else had to seem just as happy as usual when she was not so. The birds in the trees were twittering as they always did; and the insects were dancing up and down; the very leaves seemed to enjoy the sunlight. What right had they all to so much pleasure; and what was it made her hate to see them all just then? She did not know. She would have liked to cry, but then she would be asked what was the matter; and what could she say to such a question? Tell everybody that all her best and pleasantest days were over, that she felt herself a child no longer; that her cousin Percy was not what, until now, she had always believed him to be; but something far nearer, far dearer; some one quite different from anybody else in the whole world,—and all

alone as she was, Lisa felt the colour rush to her cheeks at the thought, and she hid her face as if her crimson blushes could be seen. No, cost her what it might, she must hide what she felt—hide how foolish, nay, how wrong she was. For was it not wrong to think in that way of one who, of course, had no such thoughts of her? How was it likely, indeed, that he would care for such a silly good-for-nothing little thing as she was? He had been very kind to her, kinder than anybody she had ever known, except Mary. How much he had thought of her, and in how many ways he had given her pleasure! but he had done it all because she stood alone there, because she had no home of her own, no parents or brother or sister to turn to, and because he knew how sadly, at times, she felt the want of them. It was that which had made him so kind, so very good to her; but he had never meant anything else—he had never intended to call forth anything like her present feelings: and what right had she then to have them? None at all—nor would she—she would drive them all away, and never, never think of such a thing again. Or if she could not do this (and she felt at the time what an utter impossibility it was), at any rate no one should know or suspect it; least of all Percy himself: and, at this determination, Lisa clenched her hand very tight and sat bolt upright, as if she would have bidden defiance to herself and all about her. It was seldom that she was softened in trouble. Doubt or unhappiness

of any kind seemed, indeed, to have quite the contrary effect upon her, and her young face grew now almost fierce and hard in its resolve, as she fought that strong battle with all her deepest feelings, and made up her mind that, come what would, her secret should be her own—none should ever guess it.

How the rest of the day passed she hardly knew. She went downstairs at luncheon time, and met every one as usual; and she talked as she always did, and all things went on as on any other day; except that the party was even more lively than in general, for Arthur being there kept all about him in one prolonged burst of merriment. But the voice that she most longed to hear was silent, and the one person whom she most wished and yet dreaded to see, was missing. He came in once, indeed, but it was not to stay. He left again almost immediately; his coming and going being unnoticed apparently, by everyone but herself. But she, though she seemed to pay no attention to him, and never even turned her head, was fully aware of his presence, and knew all he did. She knew when he came in, she heard his step at the far end of the room, and knew when he passed behind her chair. She knew, too, that he went to another table, that he stood there looking over some papers, and that he waited afterwards for a minute or two to write a note. And then she knew that he went again, and she felt as if there were a blank all round her.

And yet she talked with the others, and joined in what was going on, and after dinner she returned to Mary's room to finish, as she had promised, the work she had left undone; and then tea-time came, and afterwards she loitered about in the green-walk with Susan and Constance till the second dinner was over, and everybody came out into the garden, as they always did in the evening. The day was just the same in every respect as any other; there was no change in anything or anyone except herself; and great as was that which had come over her, it was unknown to those about her. No one saw any difference in her, unless it were that she was in even wilder spirits than usual, and that there was a shade more of petulance and daring in her manner, which not even her aunt's presence could restrain as it generally did. But by those who knew her it was set down to one of her care-for-nothing moods—things of too common occurrence with her to excite remark—and the only person who seemed to pay much attention to it was Isabel. She looked grave enough at times, at what she saw and heard.

'I wish, Lisa, you wouldn't talk in that very light trifling way,' she said, as they were going in that evening. 'Really, to listen to you and Arthur, one would think you could neither of you speak a word of sense. Why can't you talk like other people, instead of being so foolish? I don't like to hear you.'

Lisa put up one shoulder in her wilful impatient way.

'I am afraid you don't like a great many things I do, Isabel. I'm very sorry, but I can't help it. I'm not perfect yet, and I don't suppose I ever shall be. You had better give me up, for I am quite sure I shall never please you.' And with a little scornful laugh she marched away.

'What a long, long day this has been!' was her last thought that night. Was every other to be as long and as weary? Was she always to go on as she was doing then, or what was to be the end of it all?

Her first conscious thought on waking the next morning was, that it was Percy's birthday. She had been looking forward to it before for weeks, and all her leisure time lately had been devoted to a drawing, which she had intended to give him for a present on that day. It was not much of a present, certainly—she knew that; but it was the only one she could give, for everything else cost money, and she had none—not even enough to buy materials for any piece of work she might have been able to do; so, after much anxious private deliberation, she had fixed upon a sketch of the Priory, as a thing he was sure to like, and which was, in every way, within the compass of her powers. She had taken it from the far end of the garden, unknown to anyone; and had finished it off with great care in her own room at odd times, and

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNEXPECTED CATASTROPHE.

'WE'LL have our dance this evening,' Arthur remarked, as they came into the drawing-room after dinner. 'The gods, I mean the goddesses, are propitious, and we muster so strong to-night,' looking round at a large reinforcement of country friends who had come in for the day, 'that it would be a "rale" shame to miss such an opportunity. Nelly, go and hunt them all up and tell them what we are going to do, while I get the place into something like proper trim for the occasion. Here goes,' pushing a table into a corner, and then wheeling a sofa into a recess, and walking off half a dozen chairs to the other end of the room; 'now we have a little clear space. I'm not doing any mischief, honoured madam; you needn't be alarmed. Isabel, I know you don't approve of dancing, so perhaps you will play for us; or do you consider that equally wicked, a sort of aiding and abetting us in our sins?'

Isabel was getting her work together preparatory to leaving the room.

'I don't know anything about its being wicked,' she said, quietly; 'but I certainly think, that one is as great a waste of time as the other; and knowing my opinions as you do, Arthur, I think no one but yourself would have made such a proposition. But I shall not be in your way; I am going upstairs.'

Arthur shrugged his shoulders. 'I stand rebuked. Well, who will play for us, then? We can't dance without music, that's quite certain. Where's Mary? She's the one to do a kind action. She'll play all night if we ask her.'

'Mary is engaged; she is writing some notes for me,' Mrs. Tennent said. 'You had better find Lisa and tell her to come. She is the proper person, of course; it is just the kind of thing for her to do.'

'Eh, but I want Lisa for a partner; I can't spare her to be exercising her talents on the piano,' exclaimed Arthur, rather taken aback at this suggestion. 'She's promised to dance with me, and I can't let her off. She wouldn't like it herself, either. She'd rather dance any day, I know.'

'I dare say she would, but it's of no consequence what she would rather do. Some one must play, and it is only right she should make herself useful. It is what she will always have to do when she goes out; people won't ask her then what she likes best. She will have to do what she can to make herself agreeable, and she had better begin now and get accustomed

to it. Susan, you can go and call your cousin. Tell her to come directly.'

Susan disappeared, with the private remark, however, as she went, that she had not the least idea where Lisa was; she had not seen her for ever so long. Arthur walked away, not looking particularly pleased, and then as everyone seemed to be assembling, he began to look about for a partner.

'Are you engaged, Nelly? I hope not, or I shall have to ask one of the Dacres, and they are my especial abhorrence. Do have compassion on me.'

'So I would if I could,' said Nelly, with a smile. 'But Mr. Thorpe asked me at dinner, when you first began talking about it, and I promised to dance this one with him. I can't think where he is; I wish he would come.'

But Mr. Thorpe did not make his appearance, and they were all taking their places.

'Who plays, though?' everybody was exclaiming. 'Is no one going to the piano? Somebody must. I thought it was to be Lisa Kennedy, but she isn't here.'

'Where is your cousin, Susan? Didn't you tell her she was wanted?' said Mrs. Tennent, sharply.

'I can't find her; she is not in the garden, and she's not upstairs; and Mary hasn't seen her,' said Susan, breathless with the run she had had.

'Nonsense, child, she must be somewhere. You have not called her; she would have heard you if you had; she can't be very far; go again, and make haste.'

'Oh, never mind, let Nelly take her place,' exclaimed Arthur. 'You don't mind, Nell, do you? and she'll turn up by-and-bye; she'll come fast enough when she hears the music. It don't matter who plays, so that we don't lose all our time waiting.'

'I think it does matter,' said Mrs. Tennent, dryly. 'It is my wish that Lisa should play. Go directly, Susan; you heard what I said, didn't you?' And Susan went off a second time, while Arthur walked to one of the windows, and gave a long whistle.

'Here, Lisa, turn up from somewhere, can't you? All the world's waiting for you; where are you in hiding?'

There was a minute's silence, and then footsteps were heard running on the gravel-walk, and a moment after Lisa came up to the window, out of breath and with a heightened colour.

'Hallo, Scaramouch, where have you been? You look as if you had run to the Monument and back without stopping. What have you been doing? stealing fruit, or otherwise misbehaving yourself? You have a wondrous guilty appearance.'

'Come in, child,' said Mrs. Tennent, angrily. 'Why do you always contrive to be out of the way when you are wanted? and where were you just now when Susan couldn't find you? She has been looking everywhere for you. What were you doing?'

'I was in the green-walk,' Lisa murmured, in a voice that was scarcely audible, and coming, as she spoke,

just within the window, where she was half hidden by the curtain. 'I didn't know I was wanted. I didn't hear anyone call me.'

Mrs. Tennent gave her a scrutinising glance. 'Well, come in now; what are you standing there for, as if you were afraid of showing yourself? They are waiting to dance, and want some one to play to them. Get your music and begin at once; you have kept them quite long enough.'

Lisa made no answer. She went to the piano, and only asking what they wanted first, seemed very busy turning over her music-books. But she was a long time about it, and some of them grew impatient.

'Now then, Lisa, make haste,' they exclaimed. 'Can't you begin? we are all ready.'

'Not all,' said Arthur; 'where's Thorpe? there's Nelly sitting, the model of patience, waiting for him, and he is not forthcoming. Where in the world is he gone?'

Nobody knew, but some one suggested that he was very likely smoking.

'Then he's in the garden, of course—taken refuge in the green-walk too, most probably. Did you meet with him, Lisa, in the course of your peregrinations?'

Lisa was stooping over some music, and perhaps did not hear the question, for she made no reply. There was no need for one, however, for the door opened at that moment, and Mr. Thorpe himself walked in. He

looked rather surprised when he found what they were doing, and then begged pardon and hoped he had not kept them waiting. 'He hadn't understood they were going to begin so soon. He had only been in the library reading, and would have come before if he had known it;' and he made a great many apologies to Elinor for his seeming neglect—apologies which were not over when the music struck up and they began to dance.

Lisa's performance that evening was not brilliant. From some cause or other she was very nervous, and her touch was by no means the clear firm one for which her playing was generally remarked. At first, indeed, she was trembling visibly, and her hand was so unsteady that she had some difficulty in turning over the leaves at the right time; and although these symptoms passed off by degrees, it would have been evident to anyone who had watched her closely, that she found her task far from easy. But, happily, everybody was too much engrossed with their amusement to think of the music, and, except to ask her to play faster or slower from time to time, very little was said to her. She went on for more than an hour; and then, Mary coming in and offering to take her place, she was free to dance if she liked. Arthur seized her at once, and she went through the two dances she had promised with him; but it was without much spirit, and when she was asked afterwards, by some one else, she said she

was tired and wanted to rest. She stole away, and going into the back drawing-room, which was only divided from the larger one by an archway over which curtains hung, she sat down by the open window, and, resting her head upon her hand, remained for some time listlessly watching the dancers, forgotten apparently by everybody. No one came near her, until Nelly happening to come in to look for something and bringing a light with her, left it there as she went out again; and then two or three parties sauntered in once or twice, between the dances, finding it cooler than in the other more crowded room. But they came and went without noticing her, and she might have sat for long undisturbed in her retreat in the bay-window, had not some one entered at last with the express purpose of seeking her. It was Mr. Thorpe; and although she drew herself as far back as possible, and hoped in the not very bright light to escape observation, he caught a glimpse of the bottom of her dress, and immediately came up to the window. She rose hastily.

'You are not going?' he said, rather reproachfully at this sudden movement. 'Surely you will let me——'

'No, I can't; please don't,' she exclaimed hurriedly, 'I can't hear you, and really I wish to go. Don't keep me, please.' She attempted to pass him, but he had placed himself before her, and she could not get away.

'But, Miss Kennedy, you can't refuse to hear me—

you must listen to what I have to say. You misunderstood me before; you did not know what I meant, or thought I was not serious, but——'

'No, Mr. Thorpe, I understood you perfectly, and I hoped you understood me too. And I don't want to hear any more; please let me go. I hoped you wouldn't speak to me again about such things, for indeed I don't like it. I told you so. I told you I couldn't listen to you, and I really meant it. Won't you let me go?' in a voice of entreaty.

There was no reply for a moment, for Cunninghame was perplexed. That he with his handsome face and figure—his baronetcy and some thousands a year in prospective, and who had been run after by young ladies without number—that he should be refused, was a thing incredible: no girl in her senses would think of doing so; and least of all Lisa Kennedy, who had not a penny in the world, and not even a home of her own. Not that he cared for this; he was his own master and could afford to marry as he pleased; and although he would decidedly have liked it better had her circumstances in many respects been somewhat different, yet he was fairly, and for him deeply, in love with the beautiful girl before him; and in the passion of the moment, all minor considerations were thrust into the background. She was poor, certainly, very poor; and still little else than a child; singularly simple and unsophisticated in manner, and very young in all her

thoughts and ways; but these were faults she would soon lose in a little intercourse with the world, and her grace and beauty would adorn any rank in which she was placed. And he could give her a position of which she had but little idea; he could offer her wealth and everything else that was thought worth having. He had done so, indeed, and she had refused them; though he could not believe that she was in earnest in this, that she was really serious in rejecting him. She was only shy, or wanted to make the most of her power; and yet what to say more he did not know. He had been most vehement in his declarations of love, and she had turned from him, and all his attempts to obtain a favourable look or word had been unsuccessful. She had persisted in refusing to listen to him; and had seemed so distressed and so anxious for him to leave her, that he might almost have imagined she wished him to take her at her word, had not the supposition been so utterly improbable. And even now she would not hear him—she was wanting to get away. But he could not let her go like that; he must bring her to know her own mind before she left him; and while she was looking all impatience and entreaty to be allowed to go, he still kept his ground and cut off her retreat.

'Only for two minutes; you will not refuse me such a short time as that? And surely I have a right to be heard, for I can't, I won't believe you are so indif-

ferent to me as you wish to appear. Forgive my saying it, but your manner to me has been such the last few days as to give me every encouragement, and if I had doubts before of what your sentiments might be, I could not distrust them now. Nor can I think you have been trifling with me, that you have only raised hopes which you meant to disappoint——'

But that was all Lisa heard. He said a great deal more, for he was not interrupted this time, but she did not hear it. She was too much bewildered, and her thoughts were all engrossed with trying to recal what she had said and done to make him so confident, or give him reason to suppose that she cared for him in any way. She certainly had talked to him a great deal, and she wished now she had not done so. It was true he had sought her out—that he had followed her constantly when he could do so unobserved, and had seized all opportunities for private conversations; but perhaps if she had liked, she might have avoided him more; she might have said less, and have let him see that she did not wish for his company. But she had been too innocent to suspect the construction that might be put upon her words and actions; and she had been so miserable, so much taken up all the time with other thoughts, that a great deal of what he said had passed unnoticed by her. She was horrified now to think how he had misinterpreted her conduct. Was it really true that she had been trifling

with him, that she had actually given him reason to suppose she cared for him? It was such a dreadful thing to have done; she felt quite frightened and wretched at the bare idea; and the mute look of distress and perplexity with which she stood regarding him, brought Cunninghame at last to a stand-still in his speech. He paused rather abruptly, and she started—she felt that she must say something.

'Will you listen to me, Mr. Thorpe, please?' she said, trying to collect herself and to speak distinctly. 'I don't know exactly what I have done, but if I ever said or did anything to make you believe that—that—I cared for you, I was very wrong. I never meant to do so; and if you think I have been trifling with you, I am very sorry. I am not like a woman, you know, and I wasn't thinking of such things, and it never came into my head that perhaps you might misunderstand me. I am very sorry,' she repeated, in the tone of a child making a confession. 'Won't you forgive me, and mayn't I go now?'

She looked up at him beseechingly, but her eye fell beneath the glance she met, and she coloured deeply.

'Lisa, you are positively the most bewitching little creature I ever met with. But what makes you so shy and hard to get at? What else must I say to make you believe me? Will nothing persuade you to give in, and tell me that you love me?'

'No, nothing; for I don't—I don't care for you at all,

Mr. Thorpe, and I never shall.' She spoke in a low voice, but very decidedly.

He laughed. 'You are very frank; but you must allow me still to doubt you; you must let me hope a little longer. If, as you say, you don't care for me now—if you can't at present give me the answer I long for, at least, Lisa, you may——'

'Not Lisa, if you please,' she said, roused to anger at his pertinacity, and at what she considered the liberty he was taking. 'Not Lisa, if you please; I have never given you leave to call me so, nor shall I. I don't like what you are saying to me, and you must see I don't; and if you had any proper feeling, you wouldn't go on—you wouldn't keep me here when you know it's disagreeable to me, and that I don't want to hear you. I can't say anything plainer than I have said, or I would. I don't care for you, and I am quite sure I never shall; and I never meant to make you think I did. And if I were to stay here for ever, I should say nothing else, for it is the truth; and it always will be; I am sure I shall never change.' And then, seeing that he had inadvertently shifted his position a little, she slipped down suddenly, and before he could stop her, she had pushed aside a small table that was in her way, and made her escape into the middle of the room.

In her haste to effect her retreat, however, poor Lisa ran into a danger she had not foreseen, for in

brushing past the centre table, she happened to throw down the candle which Elinor had left there. It fell upon the floor without being extinguished, and while stooping to pick it up, her dress, which was a very thin light muslin, swept across it, and caught fire in a moment. She made a desperate attempt at first to put out the flames by pressing her dress tight down upon them, but this only made them spread; and, becoming alarmed, she started up wildly.

'Oh Mary, Mary, save me! Where are you, Mary?' and with a shriek of frantic terror, she rushed from the room; the air from the open window playing round her, and fanning the fire high up her skirt.

Her appearance among the dancers caused the greatest consternation, and a cry from all the ladies at once, as they caught sight of the burning figure in the archway, brought the music to a sudden stop, and created general confusion. Those nearest her fled in alarm, and by their efforts to escape, increased the universal panic, and even the gentlemen seemed for a moment to have lost their presence of mind, and looked as if paralysed by the unexpected sight. The poor child thought herself deserted, and confused with terror, and feeling the scorching breath of the flames rising to her face and neck, she turned in an agony of despair—though where she would have gone, or what she meant to do, it would have been hard to say. But a door opening just then close beside her, appeared to suggest some

bewildered hope of escape, and, too much terrified to think, she was on the point of rushing through it, when her progress was stopped by the person who was entering. A strong arm was thrown round her, which held her back, and then the heavy folds of the curtain which hung from the archway were flung over her, and she found herself forced down upon an ottoman that was close by.

'Sit still, Lisa, you are safe if you stay where you are;' and almost frenzied with terror as she was, the mere sound of that voice seemed to reassure and give her a sense of protection. She did as she was told and made no attempt to move, though he appeared to be still afraid of her alarm getting the better of her, for he kept his firm hold of her with one hand, while with the other he drew the curtain closer and closer round her burning dress. Some of the other gentlemen, too, had hastened up by this time, and with their assistance he succeeded at length in extinguishing the flames, and the last smouldering sparks that clung about her. Then he released her; and pale as death, and trembling from head to foot, she sat up again—a most deplorable figure, but, with the exception of being a little scorched, quite unhurt. The whole thing, indeed, had been only the affair of a minute; but quickly as it was all over, so swift had been the progress of the flames, that her escape seemed little else than a miracle, for the greater part of her dress was reduced to ashes,

and some of her under skirts were so much charred and burnt, as to fall away on being touched. One moment's more hesitation on the part of anyone would have made it too late to save her, if not from a dreadful death, at least from sufferings of which none could think without a shudder; and few could look at her even now without a thrill of horror at the danger to which she had been exposed. She herself was still too much confused and terrified to be able to think or speak, and when Mary, pressing her way in among the others, sat down by her side, and put her arm round her, she could only cling to her convulsively, and sob most bitterly; while Percy stood by, presenting very nearly as deplorable a spectacle as she did, his hair and clothes singed, his face blackened and scorched, and having in one respect fared even worse than herself, for his right hand and wrist had been terribly burnt, before he had succeeded in getting the flames under.

No one, however, knew anything of this. The first panic was over, but the confusion had by no means diminished, and there was so much talking, so much crowding round the spot, and so many exclamations of horror from all the ladies as they looked at the crouching trembling little figure before them, and the half-consumed curtain that still hung about her, and everybody had so many questions to ask as to how the accident had happened, that nothing else at first was

thought of. But not much information was to be got from Lisa on the subject. She only cried when asked what she had been doing, and how she had contrived to set herself on fire; and when her aunt scolded her for carelessness, she cried still more, but she could give no explanations. All that could be elicited from her at last was—

'I couldn't help it. Mary, please take me away, I am so frightened;' and then, happily for her, Dr. Tennent (who had been absent all the evening) came in, and his entrance put an end, in great measure, to the confusion that prevailed in the room; for, although his dismay at what had happened was doubtless as great as that of anyone else, he had less to say, and did not stop to ask many questions, even putting an end without much ceremony to his wife's remarks.

'My dear, it is not the time to be scolding her, whatever she has done. Don't you see the poor child is frightened out of her senses? Let her have a night's rest first, and keep what you have to say till to-morrow.' And calling for a shawl, he wrapped Lisa in it, and carried her off without more ado, Mary following him. He took her to her own room, and there, with cold water and something else which he made her drink, she came to herself, and her hysterical sobbing ceased. But she could not speak even then; and she shuddered so much whenever any allusion was

made to what had passed, that Mary, who stayed with her after Dr. Tennent went away, thought it best to avoid the subject altogether. She persuaded her to go to bed at once, and after helping her to undress, sat by her side for a long time, until at length she fell asleep. But it was a very restless, troubled sleep, and when Mary, after having paid a visit downstairs, came to her room again, she found her tossing about in such disturbed slumber that, instead of going to bed herself, she sat down beside her once more, determined not to leave her while she seemed so uneasy. And it was well she did, for Lisa kept starting and sobbing in her sleep; and several times she sat up with a cry of terror, shivering with her fears of fancied danger, till she was reassured by finding her cousin there, and could hear from her that she was really safe; and then she would fall asleep again, though only to be haunted as it seemed by dreadful dreams, and to awake anew in fresh alarm, which all Mary's gentle words and caresses had some difficulty in soothing. Once, too, she cried bitterly, and her choking sobs and half-murmured words told of some real or imaginary grief.

'It's not my fault, Percy; don't leave me, don't leave me,' she said in imploring accents. 'You don't know how miserable I am. I didn't mean to ——' and then she started up suddenly. 'What did I say, Mary? I was talking, wasn't I? Did you hear what I said?'

'Something about Percy, I believe, but I don't know what exactly. Let me shake up your pillow for you, dear, and then you will be more comfortable. Never mind me,' as Lisa began to urge her to go to bed, 'I am not at all tired. I will go when I am, I promise you. But I should like to see you in really a sound sleep first.'

Lisa gave a long sigh. 'Yes, I wish I could go to sleep; I am so tired.' And then, as she lay back once more, 'Mary, he didn't get hurt while he was saving me, did he? I never said one word to him.' She burst into tears.

'My dear Lisa, he didn't expect it. What could you have said at such a time? Don't think of it now, but go to sleep and forget it all till to-morrow. You will see him then, you know, and you can say as much as you like.'

Lisa turned her head away with another very long-drawn sigh. 'And he was not hurt?' she said.

Mary hesitated. 'Only a little; his hand was rather burnt; nothing though to make yourself uneasy about,' she added, speaking lightly. 'He would be very sorry, I am sure, if he thought you were unhappy on his account. Indeed, dear Lisa, you must not cry in that way. Why, Percy, of all people, isn't one to think much of a thing like that. What are soldiers fit for if they can't bear a little pain?'

But Lisa's tears came from a mixture of feelings, and

of some of them Mary guessed nothing. She made no answer, however; nor did she speak again, and, although for some time she still tossed about uneasily, yet her restlessness subsided by degrees, and she sank at last into a sleep so sound and quiet, that her cousin felt she might safely leave her. Drawing the curtains close, therefore, that the daylight which was just beginning to dawn might not disturb her, Mary stole quietly away, and, shutting the door behind her, retreated to her own room.

CHAPTER XVIII

'SOME DAYS MUST BE DARK AND DREARY.'

IT was very late the next day when Lisa awoke. Her uncle had said she was not to be disturbed, but allowed to have her sleep out; and most unnecessary as Mrs. Tennent considered this unprecedented proceeding, she did not attempt to interfere. Unnerved and worn out, therefore, as she was,—not only by the events of the last evening, but by the wrought-up feelings also of the three previous days,—Lisa continued to sleep on through all the usual sounds of the busy household in their morning occupations, and even the noon-day sun shining down between the lime-tree boughs, and making its way through the scanty white curtains that hung over her window, failed to rouse her from her slumbers. Mary, who came into her room between twelve and one o'clock, found her still asleep, one arm under her head, the other lying outside the bed-clothes, which had been tossed about in wild disorder, and her hair, which had escaped from her cap, tumbled about her face and upon the pillow in dark golden masses. But her repose then was so deep

and peaceful, that it would have been a pity to disturb it; and knowing how much it was needed, Mary felt vexed with herself, when, upon turning to leave the room, she happened to let fall a book that she had in her hand, and the noise it made roused her cousin at once. She started up.

'Why, Mary, what o'clock is it? You are dressed, I declare. Isn't it very late?'

'Nearly one,' said Mary, with a smile. 'I am very sorry, though, that I woke you. It was all my awkwardness in letting this book fall. But perhaps you can go to sleep again. Papa said you were not to get up till you were rested.'

'Go to sleep again!' Lisa exclaimed, aghast at such a proposition. 'Why, Mary, what would aunt Helen say? Hasn't she been very angry as it is? Nearly one! How could you let me sleep so long?' And with a vision of her aunt's displeasure before her, she lost no time in jumping up, and rushing through her toilette with a speed which left her but little time for thought—the bright weather without helping in no small degree to chase away the nervous feelings of depression which on first awaking had still clung to her from the shock she had received the night before.

It was with some shrinking, however, and with no very comfortable sensations, that, when she was dressed, she made her way downstairs to the dining-room. The luncheon-bell had rung some minutes before, and

she knew she was late and that everybody would be there. She felt like a child that had done something wrong, and was not sure how it would be received; and she dreaded the remarks and questionings to which she would be exposed. It was almost in desperation that, after lingering at the door for some little time, she summoned courage to open it and walk into the room. As she had expected, all eyes were turned upon her at once, and looking very guilty she stopped short before she got half-way across the room. But Dr. Tennent, at the bottom of the table, paused in his carving, and held out his hand.

'Well, my little girl, and so you are come at last! But what are you standing there for, looking as if you were frightened still?' and then as she sprang forward and rushed into his arms, he gave her a long kiss. 'Don't you know how very glad we are to have you safe among us all, not hurt in the least, eh? Indeed, my child, it is a great mercy; and we can't be too thankful you have had such an escape.'

He kissed her again, and Lisa gave him a great hug. She did not mind anything after that, and could face even her aunt's grave looks with courage; but when, upon making her way round to her own seat, she had to pass the window where Percy was standing with some letters in his hand, she stopped again. If a night's rest had invigorated and restored her, in appearance at least, to her usual self, it certainly had not had that effect

upon him. He was looking paler and more worn than she had ever seen him; and the sight of his bandaged and useless hand brought the colour into her face. It brought back, also, with intense vividness, all the feelings of those moments of terrible peril when, in hopelessness and agonising fear, she had fancied herself deserted by everyone, and had realised the dreadful fate which she thought was awaiting her. The overpowering horror and sense of helplessness which she had experienced then, all came back upon her. If it had not been for him, where would she have been now? Not standing there alive and well, with the hopes and pleasures of daily life still about her. She shuddered to think of what might have been; of a darkened room and a bed of pain; or perhaps even worse, of a cold and silent sleep, shut out for ever from the brightness and beauty of the world around, and the enjoyments she prized so much. That she had been spared all this was owing to him; she knew it well enough; and she longed to tell him so—she would have given everything she had to tell him all she thought and felt about it, and to thank him only one quarter as much as she wished to do.

And if they had been alone, she would have done so; the feelings of a warm and grateful heart would have carried her away and overcome the painful reserve of the last few days; but as it was, before everyone, it seemed impossible to speak. Her tongue was tied; and although she tried to say something, she hardly

knew what it was herself, and to everyone else it was unintelligible. She must leave it to some other time, she thought; she would find him when no one else was by, and then tell him all she wanted. But in the meanwhile, was he not thinking her very ungrateful? She feared so; he was looking so grave, and she did not understand that tightened pressure of the lips and fixed expression of face, which to one more skilled in physiognomy would have told of the fear of betraying emotions that he felt were not sufficiently under his control. Child as she was she could not see this; and she thought him cold, and fancied he was hurt at her silence. He had a right, certainly, to expect more; he had a right to look for some thanks at least; but though she tried to speak, her voice would not come. He looked constrained also, and although as she passed him he held out his hand, and said something about hoping she was quite well and had got over her fright; yet his tone was forced and stiff, and his manner altogether different from what it would have been a few days back. The change struck her most painfully; the more so because she felt it was her own doing—that she herself only was to blame for it. She gave some commonplace answer now, it was all she could do, and, with a quivering lip, she walked away to her seat. How ungrateful he must think her, was the one thought filling her mind; of course, he could know nothing of her real feelings, he

could not see how she was longing to speak and could not find words to do so. But she would—she would not let this go on any longer—directly she could, the moment dinner was over, she would try to see him alone and then tell him everything. She did not even think of what she should say, or how she should explain the alteration in her conduct towards him: all she thought of was letting him know that she was not so ungrateful as she seemed; and she forgot everything else in this one idea.

She longed for dinner to be over that she might get away, and find the opportunity she wanted; and the fear lest he might, as he often did, leave the room before they had finished, and perhaps go out somewhere for the rest of the afternoon, kept her in a state of suspense which completely took away her appetite. She could hardly touch anything, and did not even like to raise her eyes, for Mr. Thorpe was on the opposite side of the table, and she was afraid of encountering his gaze. So she sat silent and downcast, wishing people would eat a little faster and not talk so much, and above all that they would not say so very much about what had happened the night before. They did not know, perhaps, how very painful it was to her to hear any allusion to it—how gladly, if she could, she would have forgotten it all; and although her varying colour and embarrassed looks might have betrayed something of what was passing in her mind, no one seemed to understand or enter into her feelings.

No one but Percy. That he saw or guessed something of her distress she could not help thinking; though she never caught his eye, nor did he appear to be paying attention to her in any way. But he was very silent on the subject she disliked so much, and he made the attempt many times to turn the conversation, though not with great success, for even after a temporary diversion, it was sure to return to the same channel, and, had others been inclined to leave it alone, Mrs. Tennent had no such intention. She was exceedingly annoyed at the damage that had been done in the drawing-room, and said very much, also, about the alarm that had been felt by everyone through what she was quite sure was the result of extreme carelessness. She should like to know now how it had all happened, as she supposed Lisa must be able by this time to give some account of it. Some one else might have been able also to give some account of it, but he was silent, of course; and Lisa did not even raise her eyes as she told how she had been passing the table and had thrown down the candle, and then, while stooping to pick it up, had set fire to her dress; but her hesitation and extreme embarrassment did not tend to remove her aunt's displeasure.

'Well, I must say that it is just such an explanation as I should have expected from you, Lisa; simply because the whole affair was so very careless that it never would have happened to anybody but yourself.

Pray, what were you doing there at all? Why were you not with the others?'

'I was resting; at least, I had been; I was coming away,' Lisa murmured in confusion, which was remarked by everyone at the table.

Mrs. Tennent looked at her. 'It is very strange, there is something I don't understand. But if you were coming away, why didn't you come quietly, as anybody else would have done? Of course, you were rushing out as you always do, or you would never have contrived to throw the candle down, and then to sweep your dress into it afterwards! Really, how you managed to be so careless passes my comprehension! But it is like everything else you do; you have no thought for anything but just what is passing at the moment; and you have no consideration for other people's feelings, or you certainly would take more care and not be so heedless. The Dacres were almost frightened out of their senses last night; and so was everybody else.'

'Herself included,' said Dr. Tennent, kindly, and putting out his hand to her again. 'It was worse for you than anyone, my little Lisa, wasn't it? You must remember that, Helen; you must not blame her more than necessary. It was a terrible thing for her, poor child! She was the one to be frightened if anybody was, and you had better let her forget it now if she can.'

'Nonsense, Dr. Tennent,' said his wife, angrily. 'How can you talk in that way! Pray don't make her more careless than she is; she is quite bad enough. Whose fault was it she was frightened at all? You surely don't mean you are going to pity her for what she could have helped easily enough if she had liked? No, indeed, that is not my way; when people bring misfortunes on themselves they can't expect much sympathy; it is those who suffer by their carelessness who ought to be pitied. And poor Mrs. Dacre was terribly alarmed, so was Rose. They were both in hysterics afterwards; and several others were almost as bad. We had quite a scene.'

'Yes, indeed, I can vouch for the truth of that,' remarked Arthur, in an aside and with a melancholy shake of his head.

'Indeed, Lisa, it was very careless of you,' continued Mrs. Tennent, ignoring the interruption—'extremely careless, and I am very much vexed about it altogether. I hope you know those handsome curtains are quite spoiled?'

'That was Percy's doing, my dear,' said the doctor, drily. 'You must blame him for that;' at which there was a general laugh; while Arthur remarked again that Percy certainly had not waited, as he ought to have done, to calculate the cost of these said curtains, or he would have discovered that they were by

far too expensive an article to be used for such a purpose. He should have stayed to find an old shawl or blanket, or something else that had seen good wear, and was not wanted by anybody. 'Though, what would have become of Lisa in the meantime, we won't venture to say. Most probably she would have been half-way back to the Monument before the extinguishers were produced. By-the-bye, I am afraid, Lisa, we can't congratulate you upon your conduct on the occasion. You are not cut out for a heroine, that is quite certain; for heroines always have their senses about them and know exactly what to do in all emergencies; and that was not your case by any means. Don't you know that to go tearing about as you were doing was the very worst thing possible? Why didn't you sit still till somebody came to help you?'

'Nonsense, Arthur! Don't talk in that way,' said Isabel. 'She ought to have thrown herself on the ground; that would have been the right thing to do. Surely, Lisa, you must have heard that it is the best chance at such a time. Running about of course increases the draught, and makes the flames draw faster. You might have thought of that, I should think.'

'I was so frightened,' Lisa said, in a low voice, 'I didn't think of anything.'

'Ah, well, the case is a proven one,' said Arthur, in a decided tone. 'Both you and Percy were wanting in

presence of mind. He for not waiting to make his calculations and hunt up old blankets, and you for not lying on the floor till the blankets came. And now the best thing to do will be to get up another exhibition this evening, and Isabel and I will be the performers; and I have no doubt we shall give perfect satisfaction by our coolness and self-possession under the circumstances. What do you say, Isabel? Shall we give the world an opportunity of seeing how such things ought to be managed?'

But here Arthur was called to order by Mrs. Tennent, who said she would not allow any joking upon the subject—it was not a thing to laugh at, for it had been very serious as it was, and might have been still worse—she would not let him laugh or make anyone else laugh about it. At which rebuke Arthur made a feint of looking very penitent, and then asked for another slice of mutton.

'I'll tell you what, though, Lisa,' he began again, while he was disposing of it—'I'll tell you what, and that is, that you ought to be eternally grateful to Le Balafré,' lowering his tone. 'And if you did what you ought, you'd tell him so now in public, and let him see how much obliged you are to him, which is what I believe you haven't done yet. It is my firm opinion you haven't even given him a civil "thank you."'

Lisa was silent, but her head was bent and he could not see her averted face.

'I don't understand it,' he went on. 'I never was more astonished in my life than I have been the last three days, to find that you and he know no more of each other than you did when I went away. I can't think what you have been doing all this time; for though I know you were always famous for your prejudices, and could stick to them, too, when you liked, I never thought you would carry them so far as this. But you must give in now, Lisa; even if you can't come to thinking him good-looking, you must end by liking him. Gratitude alone, if nothing else, will bring you to that.'

There was no reply still from Lisa; but most unfortunately for her this speech was overheard by Susan, who, as usual upon such occasions, was quite ready to make her own comments on it. 'I don't think gratitude will make Lisa like Percy,' she remarked, sapiently. 'She always said she didn't like him, and she knew she never should. She told me once he was so very ugly she couldn't bear to look at him.' And although this communication was not perhaps intended for everybody, it was sufficiently audible to be heard by anyone who did not happen to have their attention otherwise engaged.

'Oh, Susan!' was all that poor Lisa could exclaim, the crimson colour rushing to her face and the tears to her eyes.

'Why, Lisa, you said so; you know you did.'

'Susan,' said her mother gravely, 'mind what you are saying. If Lisa chooses to make rude speeches, there is no need for you to repeat them. Don't let me hear anything more of that sort.' And Susan, abashed, returned to her dinner, with which she soon appeared to be fully engrossed.

But Lisa could not raise her head again. From one glance she had taken she saw that what had passed had been overheard by Percy, and between shame and wretchedness she felt overwhelmed. She would have liked to rush away and hide herself from everybody—from him in particular—for how she could ever look him in the face or speak to him again, she did not know. That one of her thoughtless, foolish speeches made so long ago, should have been repeated just when he had done so much for her—saved her from what she could not bear even to think of, and when she was feeling that she could never thank him enough, was dreadful. Nor was it true now. They had been silly, thoughtless words, spoken in one of her wilful moods, before she had learned to know him. But of course he could not tell that. Perhaps he fancied they were her thoughts still; and in bitter self-reproach Lisa upbraided herself for that and every other idle and prejudiced thing she had ever said of him, and felt that she would have given anything to recall them all. She scarcely heard a word of what was going on around her, and the first thing that roused her was

something her uncle was saying. He was looking at his watch.

'Well, Percy, if we want to catch the 2.10 train, we had better be starting; we've not much more than a quarter of an hour to do it in.' And he got up.

'Where are they going, Arthur?' she said then.

'Going? To London, of course. Percy is, that's to say. Oh, I forgot you were not here at breakfast. He had a letter and is going about something, I don't know what; business of some sort, I believe. He'll be away two or three weeks, I think.'

Two or three weeks! The words fell like lead on Lisa's heart. To be all that time without seeing him, without speaking to him, or hearing him speak! To her childish imagination it seemed an age; a sort of indefinite space, during which all the light and happiness of her life would be gone, and if she had ever doubted what he was to her, she would have known it now. It came upon her so suddenly too—like some crushing blow; if she had had a little time to think about it, she would not, she fancied, have minded it so much; but not to know it till he was actually going, made it so much worse. And to let him leave without saying one word to him, without thanks of any kind! And much as a few minutes before she had dreaded speaking to him after what had just passed, she felt now that it would be worse, far worse to let him go without doing so; without giving him reason to think her not quite so

ungrateful as she was seeming then. But she must—for where could she find the opportunity of exchanging, without being overheard, even the half-dozen words she was longing to say.

She sat for a moment or two, silent and very miserable; and then, as everyone else seemed to be moving, she rose too—almost mechanically, for she hardly knew what she was doing. But little George just then came trotting into the room, and caught hold of her dress, and that diverted her attention. She took him up in her arms, and as he began to rock himself backwards and forwards with great energy, and call out 'gee, gee,' with various other expressive exclamations in his baby language, she discovered that he had caught a glimpse of the horse and carriage at the hall-door, and would like to have a nearer view of them. Perhaps, indeed, he was contemplating a drive, but this being out of the question at that time, she could only carry him into the hall that he might look at the gee-gee through the window, and while standing there with him in her arms, the thought came into her mind that she might now, perhaps, find the opportunity she was wanting. Percy would not leave without saying good-bye to her, and she was alone; she might surely say something, even at that last moment, to make up for her late coldness and estrangement, and that he might not go away thinking so badly of her as he must do then. The thought had hardly time to frame itself into a wish,

when the chance for which she was looking was offered to her, for Dr. Tennent was detained for a minute, and while waiting for him Percy walked into the hall. Whether he had seen Lisa through the dining-room door which stood half open, or whether it were merely the idea that standing there would expedite their departure, was not certain, but he came up to the window where she was, and Georgie in great delight stretched out his arms to go to him. He, at least, was too young to mind plain looks or any other personal disadvantages in those who would play with and amuse him; and his tall grave brother had long since won his heart as only one who was naturally fond of children could do. He looked ready for a burst of tears now, when he found that he was not to have the game he expected.

'No, my little man. I can't take you to-day. I haven't time. Besides your romps want a pair of arms, and I have only one now; we must wait till I come back.' He stooped to kiss the child. 'Good-bye, Lisa,' and he held out his hand to her.

There was no resentment in look or voice—no trace even of annoyance—at what had in truth cut him to the very heart. For, plain as he knew himself to be, and perfectly aware as he was of the frequent contrast between himself and others, it was one thing to know this as a fact, to which, however little flattering he might find it at times, he could yet, as a sensible man,

be perfectly indifferent, and quite another to find that it came between him and the being whom he idolised. For if ever man loved woman, he loved Lisa Kennedy; deeply and blindly loved her; with all the passionate energy with which natures, that are supposed to be cold, so often love; and it was a bitter, wringing disappointment to find that even the lingering hope, which, almost in spite of himself, he had still cherished of pleasing her, was over now—quite over and gone; and that he had no chance of winning her love. He was not the one to please her, some one else must do so—some one handsomer, gayer, more like her own bright self—Cunninghame Thorpe, perhaps; for like two or three others, Percy had noticed much during the last three days; and although it was hard to reconcile what he saw with what he had previously known, yet he could only suppose that Lisa had changed her mind—that she found attractions now where she had seen none before; and that a closer acquaintance was bringing about a better understanding between them. And he did not blame her that she preferred another to himself, that she could not love him; but still it was very hard to give her up; and far down in the bottom of his heart there was an aching, writhing sense of disappointed hopes, and many wounded and bitter feelings. There was little sign outwardly, however, to tell of what was passing in his mind. Only his face was paler than usual, and his voice not quite so steady as he

said, good-bye. But Lisa was too much agitated to notice these symptoms. Her breath came short and fast, and when she tried to speak she could not; she felt choking, and yet the opportunity she had wished for was going, and she had not used it.

'Good-bye,' was all she could say in answer; and he turned away and walked towards the door. And then, with the sense that he was really going, her faltering resolution returned.

'Percy!' Her voice was very low, but he looked round, and seeing her eyes fixed upon him he came back to the window.

'You called me, Lisa, didn't you? Do you want anything?' But at that moment Mr. Thorpe made his appearance in the hall, and the time for explanation was gone.

'No, thank you, nothing.' And she hid her face on Georgie's curly head that her tears of vexation and disappointment might not be seen. Dr. Tennent came out, and the next minute they were gone. The carriage turned the corner of the street and they were out of sight; and carrying her charge back to the dining-room, Lisa set him down there among the others, and slipping through the library to avoid Mr. Thorpe, who she knew was lying in wait for her where she had left him, she ran up the back stairs and flew to her own room, where she locked the door, and throwing herself on her bed gave way to the most passionate bursts of grief.

Yes, it was all over, and he was gone, and she had not told him what she wanted. He was gone without a word from her; and it seemed as if with him all the sunshine of her life had gone too. It mattered little that in three weeks' time he would be back again—she lived only in the present, and everything was a blank now. Besides, things could never be again what they had been; all that had been so happily and pleasantly connected with him was over; and how happy she had been, and how pleasant he had made everything to her, she was only fully realising now that it was all at an end. She almost wished he had never come home at all—that she had never known him; for then she would never have felt what it was to be without him; she would never have had the misery of seeing all familiar things about her, and yet knowing that he was far away. And by-and-bye it would be still worse, for he would be going, not for a few weeks only, but for very long; only coming home now and then for a short time at long intervals; perhaps with years between each visit, as she knew had been the case before. And when he did come, she might be away, and never, never meet him; and the dull aching sense of wretchedness in poor Lisa's heart grew deeper at the thought—too deep at last for tears. She could only lie in a sort of forlorn state, feeling so utterly miserable and desolate that she wondered whether she could go on feeling so for long, and live. Were other

people ever so unhappy? Had anyone else ever felt what she was feeling? She did not know, but she thought that if it were so—if others went through what she was then going through, there could be very little happiness in the world; it could not be at all the beautiful place it had always seemed to her, and why anyone should wish to live very long in it she could not tell. She did not think she wished it very much herself; everything was so dreary now, and she was so lonely—no, not lonely exactly, for Mary was there still; but dearly as she loved her cousin, she was not all she wanted then. There was another far dearer to her, and no one else could fill his place; and without him—without the interest he had felt in all she did, and the many hundred little ways in which he had helped and thought of her, she felt more lost and lonely, more dreary and desolate than words can describe.

And he knew nothing of it all. He was journeying to London on that hot summer's day, full of thoughts of her, but little dreaming that while he sat musing sadly over his shattered hopes, believing her indifferent whether he went or stayed, she was shedding many bitter tears in her silent room, and that in her inmost heart the long yearning cry that was always going up was, 'Oh, Percy! Percy! if you would only come back; and if I could only make things as they were a little time ago. I was *so* happy then!'

But miserable as Lisa was, thinking no one had

ever been so unhappy before, and believing, as she did, that she could never be happy again, it would not have been like her to make any exhibition of such feelings, or even to allow them to be suspected if she could help it. She had an intense dislike to anything approaching to pity, and always fiercely resented any intrusion into her griefs. All her tears in her childish sorrows and troubles had been shed in secret, or only witnessed by Mary, the one person to whom formerly she had ever turned for sympathy. But even she could be no comfort to her now; for so utterly ashamed was she of her new and strange feelings, that she would have gone through anything rather than betray them; and her one thought when she left her room that afternoon was how she could best appear natural and indifferent, and prevent any suspicion of what was passing in her mind. So that no one guessed what she felt, she could bear being miserable; for however unhappy she might be, she supposed she could go on as usual. It did not much matter that the spirit and the pleasure were gone out of everything; that she did not care now for the things she had been interested in before; she could do them still. Nobody should find out there was any difference in her, and that was all that signified. It mattered little that she had been very happy, and was not so any longer, and that she could not be again, she thought, because the things that had made her so were changed,

and she was changed too. No one need know that; she would seem just the same as usual; and, moreover, when Percy came back, she would not be so silly as she had been the last three or four days. She would make up her mind to meet him and speak to him as she did to anyone else; she would force herself to be natural and unconstrained with him. She had been very, very foolish, but she would not be so again; and with these and a host of other resolutions Lisa went back to her everyday life, and tried to forget the past and all that had lately made its great charm and happiness.

CHAPTER XIX.

BAFFLED.

THE first change that took place after Percy left was Mr. Thorpe's departure. He professed to have been visiting at the Moat, but as a great deal more than half his time had been spent at the Priory, it is probable that he was more missed there than by his uncle. He had contrived, too, to produce a very favourable impression there; for although so persistent in his attentions to Lisa, he had by no means been so outwardly engrossed with her, as to forget what was due to others · and had made himself so generally agreeable that his going was a source of regret to nearly everyone. Not to her, however. She was never more delighted than when he came over one morning to say that he was obliged to return home sooner than he expected, and should be leaving the next day. She had been living, lately, in a perpetual state of disquietude, for in spite of all her assurances on the night of her accident that she did not care for him, and never should, he himself did not seem to have arrived at the same conclusion; and he had evidently been on the look-

out for an opportunity of renewing his offer. She was quite tired of trying to avoid him, and of inventing pretexts for rushing away or being absorbed with something else whenever he made his appearance; and it was an intense relief to her to think he was really going—that she need not be afraid of meeting him at every turn: and might do what she liked, and go where she pleased again, without fear of being intruded upon by him.

She had hard work, however, that last day, to keep out of his way, so determined was he to make the opportunity he was seeking, and oblige her to listen to him once more. But bent as he was upon this, she was equally bent upon not hearing him; and, being a young lady of resolute disposition, he found it by no means easy to carry out his intention. All the morning, indeed, she was shut up in Mary's room, and he did not get a glimpse of her; and although at luncheon he took care to secure the seat next the one where she always sat, she out-manœuvred him by persuading Constance to change places with her. But after luncheon she was sent into the garden by her aunt to gather some flowers for the dinner-table that evening, for there was to be a large party. It was an opportunity too good to be lost: and when Mrs. Tennent and Elinor, whom he had promised to attend on some shopping expedition, went upstairs to put on their bonnets, he walked out after Lisa, who was very busy among the flower-beds,

filling a large basket with the roses, verbenas, petunias, &c., that flourished there in abundance.

She was going through her work in great haste, having perhaps anticipated some such proceeding on his part, and hoping no doubt to finish before he had time to put it into execution. Finding herself disappointed in this, she pretended, at first, not to see him, and went flitting about here and there in all directions, contriving to lead him a dance all round the garden before he could come up with her, and when he did overtake her at last, she discovered suddenly that the roses were pricking her fingers, and remembered that she had left her gloves in the house. He wanted to be allowed to cut the flowers for her, and when she declined this, offered to fetch the gloves if she would tell him where they were to be found; an offer which was perfectly useless, even had she wished to accept it; for when did Lisa ever know where anything of hers was to be found? She had not an idea now; and as she said so, she began to walk away.

'Can't you give me two minutes, Miss Kennedy? I have been wishing all day to speak to you; I may not have another opportunity. You are in no hurry, are you?'

'Yes, I am. The sun is very hot, and I want to finish. I can't stay.' And off she went, leaving her basket and flowers upon the ground. But although he mounted guard diligently over these for more than

a quarter of an hour, she did not return; and Mrs. Tennent and Elinor being ready then for their walk, he was obliged to leave the place, having the satisfaction of seeing Lisa and Prince come out of the house by one door as he went in at another.

'It was very provoking,' he muttered to himself, 'but he would speak to her yet;' and with this resolve, he attended her aunt and cousin about the town half the afternoon, and making some pretext at length to return without them, discovered that Lisa had gone out with Lane and the others for their usual walk. He spent another hour in rambling about the nearest country roads in search of them, but not succeeding, came back, very hot and tired, and having lost a good deal of his temper by the way. He had not fairly recovered it when he went into the drawing-room after dinner that evening, and then found her sitting at one of the windows on a low stool, playing at draughts with Constance, but apparently so much taken up with her game, that she saw very little of what went on in the room, and did not even notice his entrance. Nor could he get near her, there being several other ladies present, to whom he was obliged to give his attention, and Lisa, not being 'introduced,' kept mostly in the background; very right and proper no doubt, and of course what her aunt wished, but particularly vexatious to him just then. He considered it an especial bore to have to devote himself to the Miss Frasers, and do

duty at the piano half the evening, while all he could see of Lisa was an occasional glimpse, when some one happened to move, or perhaps the fluttering of her dress, as she passed across the room.

A very simple dress it was, and a great contrast to all those about her; but in spite of its exceeding plainness, there was no one there who looked better than she did. She had learned the art now of setting off her things to the best advantage—the wish to please one she loved had awakened her dormant taste, and careless as she was still in many ways, she was no longer so in that particular. The change in her had been noticed lately by everyone; but desirable as it had been, it did not meet with universal approbation. Not only Isabel, but Mrs. Tennent also, regarded it with dissatisfaction; for, although the latter had lectured her niece constantly upon her untidiness, and would have liked to see her neat and orderly, she had no wish for anything beyond; and when she saw Lisa make her appearance, as she constantly did now, with her hair arranged in elaborate plaits, her dress put on as carefully as if she were going to a ball, and perhaps a few flowers about her in lieu of other ornaments, she saw in it all a disposition to coquetry; and lamented in private to her husband, that the love of admiration which had been so strong in Mrs. Kennedy should, in spite of all her endeavours to check it, be developing itself in her daughter.

At first, indeed, she had not paid much attention to the various little adornments which Lisa had introduced into her attire, thinking they were merely the consequence of some fancy that would very soon pass off again; but when she discovered this was not likely to be the case, when she found that Lisa was not only thinking of being neat in her dress, but also how she could look her very best; that she was beginning to concern herself about her things being pretty and well-made; that she did not like little George to pull her hair about, and tumble her collars as he had always been in the habit of doing without rebuke; and that she was pleased when Arthur told her she was very pretty, and complimented her upon no longer being the Scaramouch of former days; when she saw all this, Mrs. Tennent was anything but pleased: though if the subject of these symptoms had been one of her own daughters, she would have thought nothing of them. Isabel and Elinor dressed as they pleased; and put on as many ornaments as they liked, without any remark being made; but from some cause or other, everything Lisa did was open to suspicion, and most of her actions were misinterpreted. It seemed natural in the present instance that her extreme beauty should make her vain; therefore to vanity was at once set down the sudden change which had come over her; and if there were one fault or weakness which Mrs. Tennent held in particular abhorrence, and which she judged more harshly than any other, it was

that. Perhaps it was having seen the consequences to which it might lead, which made her so hard upon it; but whatever was the cause, the signs of it which she now thought she detected in her niece, displeased her greatly.

She was displeased that evening; for although the dress that Lisa wore was a plain white one, and of the very commonest description, she had contrived to come down so as to attract everyone's attention, and her aunt had remarked in grave silence the beautiful plaits at the back of her head, which had evidently had both care and time bestowed upon them, and the scarlet geranium, which with two or three green leaves she had placed in her waist-band. She said nothing at first, but later in the evening, when Lisa was passing her on the way to the piano to take part in some duet, Cunninghame, who had been admiring her every time he could catch sight of her, and who had arrived at the conclusion that a white dress with just that little bit of colour about it was the very prettiest thing any lady could wear, overheard a peremptory command to her from her aunt, to 'Throw away those flowers.'

'Take them out directly, Lisa, and don't let me have you ornamenting yourself again in that foolish manner. I dislike exceedingly to see you thinking so much of your dress, and decking yourself out in that way, as if you were not content with what is given you. Throw them away, and don't be so silly again, if you please.'

There was a flash in Lisa's eyes at this speech, and for a moment she stood as if irresolute—then she took the flower and the leaves from her belt, and, tossing them on the floor, walked on to the piano. She did not see that Cunninghame picked them up as they fell, and when he stood by their side while she and Elinor were playing their duet, she kept her eyes fixed upon her music, and resolutely declined giving him more of her attention than she could help. When they had finished she rose to go, but before she could get away he stopped her to ask for some favourite piece of his, and although she pretended not to hear him and was walking off in a very unconcerned manner, unfortunately for her the request was overheard by her aunt, and she was sent back to the piano. The performance, it was to be hoped, gave satisfaction to Mr. Thorpe, though whether it did to anyone else was doubtful; and when it was over, Lisa sat still and folded her hands.

'Do you wish me to play any more, aunt Helen?'

'Ask Mr. Thorpe,' was the answer; and Cunninghame, delighted, begged for one more piece, which was given with the same air of indifference, and then she rose.

'I am tired now,' and away she walked. He could not get near her again for the rest of the evening, and when, at her usual hour of leaving for the night, she passed him as she went out, she would most likely have gone off altogether without saying a word, had he not

happened to be standing near the door and stepped forward to open it for her. She turned to him then very gravely.

'Good-bye, Mr. Thorpe. I hope you will have a pleasant journey to-morrow.'

It was very provoking that some one should call him just then, for it was the last opportunity he would have, and he had quite determined to make the most of it. He had planted himself there on purpose to be in her way, intending to follow her as she left the room, and now this interruption detained him. It was only for a moment, but it was quite enough to give her the start of him, and when he got into the hall it was empty. He could only see a glimpse of something white vanishing at the top of the stairs, and then hear a door close in the distance. The sound elicited some exclamation more expressive than polite from him, and for a few minutes he stood still with his hands in his pockets, as if he had not yet quite realised to himself the fact that he had been so completely baffled, and by such a child, too! Perhaps he hoped she might even then make her appearance again. But he was mistaken; he saw nothing more of her, and hearing voices near as if some one were coming into the hall, he thought it best to go back to the drawing-room.

The next day he left Atherstone with Ralph and Janet, who were also returning to Gainsford; and when Lisa knew he was really gone, she celebrated the

event by a private impromptu little dance, got up for her own edification and that of Prince, who sat on his hind legs and watched her with his bright eyes twinkling enquiringly through his shaggy hair, as if he would have asked the cause of her extreme delight. He was evidently puzzled to account for it, and quite as much so to know why, in the midst of her dance, she stopped short suddenly and, sitting down on the floor, caught him up in her arms and covered him with kisses. His rough coat was very wet afterwards, and when some one came into the room, she got up in a great hurry and ran away, as if she was not at all anxious to be seen just then.

CHAPTER XX.

MORE MISTAKES.

'I AM sure, Lisa, dear, you are not well,' was Mary's remark as she sat at work one hot afternoon, while Lisa, with a book before her, was kneeling at a table, yawning and stretching herself as if she were very weary of her employment. 'Have you a headache, or what is it makes you look so pale and heavy about your eyes? I have noticed it for several days. You are not well, I am quite sure.'

Lisa coloured a little. 'Yes, I am; I'm only tired,' yawning again.

'Tired of what?' Mary asked. 'You have not worked very hard to-day. That was one of the things, indeed, which made me think you couldn't be well. You have done so little in any way.'

'Have I? Oh, but I'm tired of being indoors. I want to go out. I did go after dinner, but aunt Helen sent me in again. She said it was too hot even for the garden, but I'm sure it's much hotter in here. I should like to go out for a good long walk somewhere; it would

be fresh and cool in the country. I'm tired of reading and of——'

'And of everything, it seems,' said Mary, as another long yawn stopped her in the middle of her speech. 'But where is your drawing? You can't be tired of that? I haven't seen you at it for several days.'

'No, but I don't think I care for it very much just now.' And Lisa fidgeted a little and turned over the leaves of her book.

'You want Percy to keep you up to it,' Mary remarked, with a smile. 'And to a good many other things, too. I don't think, Lisa, I ever saw you so idle when he was at home. What was the reason. I wonder?'

Lisa jumped up hastily. 'I don't know. Ah, there's Arthur coming across the lawn; how hot and tired he looks. He has been to Copelands, I'm sure; he said he was going there. And—' as the door opened—'here comes Isabel, and so you will have the comfort, Mary, of not seeing me idle any longer. Oh, dear, that dreadful work! How I do detest it!'

'That dreadful work' was embroidery, at which Lisa was no adept; and Isabel, who was a proficient in it, had offered, since her return home, to give her some instruction in the art; an offer which, when it was first made, Lisa had declined in all haste and with no slight symptoms of disgust, for she had no fancy at all for such employments. But Mrs. Tennent, who heard of her refusal, was very much displeased, and insisted

upon her taking advantage of the opportunity of learning such a very proper, lady-like accomplishment 'She was quite tired,' she said, 'of seeing her so unhandy in every way with her needle; and so ignorant of any kind of fine or fancy work, with which other girls could make themselves useful, while she wasted her time running about, or was engaged in some idle amusement.'

So Lisa, who at all times hated the sight of a needle, and who thought work of any kind only just bearable when it was something necessary to be done, found herself compelled to sit down regularly every day to this very wearisome employment; and many were the sighs and groans heard over it, and very little was the progress made with what she considered such a useless thing. It was wonderful, indeed, to see how slowly it advanced, and how, with the exception of being exceedingly dirty, it looked so very much the same as it had done five weeks before when she had first begun it; and while Arthur laughed at it and called it 'Penelope's web,' Lisa grew more despairing every time she looked at it, and became more vehement in declaring her utter aversion to all such kinds of handicraft. She pricked her fingers, broke her cotton, lost her thimble and then upset her work-box in trying to find it; she did everything, in short, but make any progress with that hopeless piece of embroidery; and all the time Isabel would sit by with her own work, patience itself, but very grave; so grave

that it aggravated Lisa only to look at her. She knew she was thinking her very stupid, not worth all the trouble she was taking to teach her. She knew, indeed, herself, that she was stupid; nor did she mean to be anything different, for she didn't see the use of what she was learning, and didn't want to know anything about it; but it would have been much more satisfactory if Isabel would have scolded her for her stupidity. She was used to scoldings and did not mind them; but that air of calm endurance and the magnanimous silence that accompanied it, were more irritating than any words could have been, and always had the effect of provoking her into doing her very worst.

'I should like to tear it all up,' she thought to herself that afternoon, as she sat sticking her needle in and drawing it out again at the rate of a stitch a minute. 'What will be the use of it when it's done, I wonder; and what good will it do anybody for me to be able to do this kind of work. No one will care to wear any collars I could work even if I ever finished them, which I don't believe I ever should; I should get quite sick of looking at them long before they were done. I'm sure I'm sick of this thing; I should like to put it in the fire and never see it again. I always did hate work and I always shall; except, indeed, mending Percy's gloves. I liked that, and there was some use in it too. How pleased he was to find the holes gone; and he said that no one else mended them half so well as I

did. I wish I had some now to do. I wish I had anything to do for him; I wouldn't mind what it was; but this thing;' looking at it with intense disgust. 'Fancy sitting half the afternoon over it, and when it's so lovely out of doors, too! And, oh dear, how my head aches! Mary, dear,' aloud, 'don't you think I've worked long enough? I have such a bad headache, and it is much cooler now in the garden. I should like to go out before tea. May I?'

Mary had no objection at all; she thought it a good thing, indeed; for her cousin's pale looks and general listlessness were giving her some uneasiness; and as Isabel made no remark, the work was bundled up in a great hurry and Lisa rushed off, glad to escape from a disagreeable occupation.

'I hope you don't always let her have her own way so much,' Isabel said, as the door closed. 'But she seems to do just what she likes with you, Mary. Do you never keep her steadily to anything?'

'She is not well,' said Mary, in a deprecatory tone. 'It is quite true about her head aching. I have seen it all the afternoon, and thought it a great pity she should be sitting here. I know she dislikes work,' she said with a smile; 'and that she never does half as much as she might; but there really is some excuse for her to-day. There has been for a good many days indeed. She is not well, I am quite sure.'

Isabel looked half amused, half satirical, as she

pointed to Lisa running down the green walk, swinging her hat in her hand and calling to Arthur, who sat astride on a garden bench just within sight of the window.

'Not many signs of illness there, Mary. I don't think your anxiety is at all necessary. It is my opinion Lisa would never know what a headache was, if she had nothing to do that she didn't like. It only seems to come on when she sits down to work; she is well enough at other times; and the Frasers were remarking only yesterday how extravagantly high her spirits were. They wondered if she had ever known what illness was.'

Mary was silent, but it was not because she was convinced; and as days went on, and she saw Lisa come down each morning looking pale and unrested, and watched her going listlessly through her usual employments as if she had lost all interest in them, she became more and more sure that something was amiss; and even the high spirits which Isabel had remarked could not deceive her, for she soon discovered that they were forced and variable. However gay and excited Lisa might be in the presence of others, she sank into silence and depression when alone, or when she thought herself unobserved; and although, when questioned, she always stoutly and indignantly rejected the mere supposition of being ill, and exerted herself more than that no remarks might be made, yet Mary was

very far from being satisfied, and in her uneasiness at last she spoke to her father.

Dr. Tennent, however, was not alarmed even when his attention was called to Lisa; and after observing her for a day or two he said there was not much amiss; she was only feeling the heat, and he thought a little change would do her good. The weather was unusually close and hot even for August, and there was not much fresh air to be had at the Priory. He would send her to Copelands for a few days with Lane and the younger children. Mrs. Pye would take them in as she had often done before on similar occasions, and they would all of them be the better for running about in the country for a week or so. Mary could walk over that very evening if she liked, and make arrangements for them to go as soon as possible. And the doctor, as he said this, patted Lisa on the head, and told her 'She would like that—she was very fond of Mrs. Pye, he knew—and a visit to Copelands would be a great treat to her.' And Lisa did not say 'No.' When he was so kind it would have seemed ungrateful to tell him she did not want to go, that she would much rather stay at home. And yet that was the truth, for she had no heart then for things that in general gave her so much pleasure. Besides, in two days Percy would be at home again. Mary had heard that very morning that he meant to come back on Thursday, and this was Tuesday; and although she was not sure

whether she most wished or dreaded to see him, she was quite certain that she did not wish to be away at Copelands just when he was coming back.

But she could not say so; and that evening she and Mary walked over to see Mrs. Pye and settle all things for their going. There was a lurking hope in her mind all the way out, that for some reason or other the arrangement might not be practicable—that it might not be convenient to the farmer and his wife to receive them then—but this hope was disappointed. No objection was made; Mrs. Pye was delighted at the idea of having them, and promised to take the greatest care of Miss Lisa, whose pale face excited her deepest commiseration. Not that Lisa was pale when these remarks were made, for they brought the colour into her cheeks, and she disliked them so much that she ran away into the farmyard to escape such unwelcome pity, and did not emerge from it again until Mary had transacted her business and was ready to return.

'Which day are we to go?' was her first question then, when they had left the house and were wending their way home.

'On Thursday, dear. Mrs. Pye would have had you to-morrow if we liked; but I knew Lane would be busy, so I settled the day after instead; and you are to go the first thing after breakfast.'

Thursday! the very day he was to come. She would not see him at all, then—she must wait another week—

perhaps two, before she met him again, and the time was seeming *so* long while he was away!

But although she said nothing, it almost seemed as if Mary must have guessed something of what was passing in her mind, for after a pause she said:—

'You will be sorry to miss Percy when he comes back, and he won't like to find you away, either. But you will see a good deal of him, I daresay; he is sure to get over to Copelands when he hears you are there. He will want to know how you are; you will see him on Friday, most likely.'

Lisa's reply to this was not very intelligible, and all the rest of the way home she hardly said a word, but paced wearily by her cousin's side along the dusty road, as if she had no spirit in her for talking. And yet it was a very pleasant evening, just such an one as she enjoyed in general. The sun had gone down some time before in a sea of purple and gold, and in the western sky there were still some lingering traces of the glow he had left behind, but the shades of twilight were coming on fast and the dew was beginning to fall. The air was fresh and moist, and laden with the scent of honeysuckles and traveller's joy, and the hedges were ringing with the wild, cheery chirp of countless grasshoppers. It was all just what she would have liked any other evening, but she did not care for it now; and she lagged on with such evident signs of fatigue, that Mary, though feeling it was late for them

to be out alone, and longing to hasten her steps, restrained them out of pity to her. It was getting quite dark when they reached the Priory; so dark, that when they went in and were crossing the hall on their way to the drawing-room, Lisa, who was first, ran against some one before she was aware, in the dusk, that anybody was near her. She looked up in surprise, and could just make out a very tall dark figure in the dim light. Dim as it was, however, it was quite enough to enable her to recognise the form.

'Why, Percy!' she exclaimed; and in the strange flutter of surprise and joy that came over her at meeting him again so unexpectedly, her voice hardly sounded natural. Perhaps he thought he had startled her.

'Is that you, Lisa?' and as he opened the drawing-room door at the same moment, the light from the lamp there streamed into the hall. 'I beg your pardon, but I didn't see you coming. I hope I didn't frighten you.'

'Oh, no, not at all;' and then, as Mary hastened up with exclamations of astonishment and pleasure, and he turned to her, she passed on into the room without saying any more. She had meant to meet him naturally and indifferently; ever since he went, indeed, she had been settling what she should say and do, and how she should look, when she first saw him again; and she had quite intended to be as unconscious, and as like her old [redacted] as possible. But somehow this beginning was

not at all successful—she would not at any other time have walked away without waiting to ask what had brought him back sooner than he expected, or letting him see that she was glad he had come; and when it was too late she was vexed with herself for having done so. And in consequence, perhaps, of that first mistake, she found it difficult to throw off her returning feelings of shyness and reserve with him. She could not make up her mind to address him; and she stood by the table round which all the others were gathered talking, angry with herself for being so constrained and stupid, and yet quite unable to summon up courage to speak even a few words to him. She could only stand and listen to what was being said, though from what she heard she could not find out that anything in particular had brought him home. There was something said, indeed, about some one going to Scotland, but that could not have anything to do with him, and all thought of it was presently absorbed in greater news. Arthur, by whose side she was standing, turned to her with a smile:

'Would you like to be introduced to a new acquaintance, Lisa? Some one you have never seen before; though I believe he knows you, for he has been asking for you twice at least in the last half-hour. Let me have the pleasure of introducing him? Major Tennent, you were enquiring for Miss Kennedy just now, and when you heard she was

exploring the roads between here and Copelands under the protection only of a female relative, you seemed to have serious fears for her safety. I am happy to tell you they were without foundation, for she has escaped the highwaymen and gipsies supposed to infest this part of the country, and is quite ready now to make your acquaintance. Allow me, therefore—' A grand flourish followed.

Percy smiled a little, but Lisa looked bewildered.

'Major Tennent!'

'Yes, Major Tennent, of course. Major Tennent, Royal Engineers. My dear Lisa, I hope you don't generally look so puzzled—not to say "daft"—when you are introduced to people. Is there anything so very extraordinary in his having got his majority?'

Lisa coloured. 'I didn't know he had,' she said, in a low voice.

'Of course you didn't. We didn't know it till just now, and he didn't know it himself till yesterday. But now that you do know it, where are your congratulations? You are not going to stand there without saying a word, are you? Unless, indeed, you don't think he deserves his honours. It looks rather like it, as you can't even tell him you are glad he has got them.'

'I *am* glad, though—*very* glad,' Lisa murmured; and although the words were not addressed to Percy, and were spoken in a low tone, he heard them, and turned to Isabel, to whom he was speaking.

'Thank you, Lisa;' and something in his manner was so like old times, that for a moment she forgot everything but the pleasure of hearing his voice again, and she looked up with a smile. And then she shrank away frightened, and vexed with herself, because she could not meet his eye without colouring, and because she could not even know he was so near her, without such strange feelings of shyness and confused happiness. How silly it was of her to be so stupid and conscious! Was she never to be able to meet him like any one else? never to hear him speak, even to others, and of the most trivial things too, without her cheek flushing, and her heart throbbing? And she had meant to be so different; she had meant to be natural and unconstrained; to talk to him just as she always used, to show no change at all in her manner to him.

'A good beginning this, certainly,' thought poor Lisa, as she felt her burning face, and found how unsteady her hand was when she tried to work that evening; 'it's fortunate for me, I think, that I'm going to Copelands, and no one will see me there; but oh, how I wish that Janet had never said that! How I wish we could have gone on as we were before, and that I could have been happy still, without being so frightened. And what must he think of me too; for that is worse than all. I wouldn't care for it half so much if I didn't know how much I must be vexing him by being so strange, and so very, very cold. I never cared once

how much I vexed him, for I could make it up again with him then whenever I liked. But now it's different. I care so very much; I would give all I have to please him, and yet I can't; and all because I am so very foolish. Oh, how I wish I were a child still, and had never had such thoughts! I was happy before they came, and now I'm not! I'm miserable!'

CHAPTER XXI.

UNDER THE LIME-TREES.

'AND you won't come out then, Mary?'

'No, dear, I don't think I can; I promised Mrs. Rivers to cut out these frocks for the school children to-day, and they will take me so long, that you had better not wait for me. But I will come to you if I have time before tea; you will be in the green-walk, I suppose?'

'Yes, I am going to take my work there;' and with something like a sigh she looked at 'Penelope's web,' Lisa closed the door of her cousin's room, and went slowly down stairs.

The house was very still and silent that afternoon, seeming half deserted, as in truth it was, nearly every one being out. Mrs. Tennent, with Isabel and Elinor, had gone out for the day; the doctor was making his usual rounds, the boys were away somewhere, and so were the younger children with Lane. Arthur, too, had disappeared; and as for Percy, Lisa had not seen him since breakfast. She was not surprised, therefore, to find the lower rooms all so empty and quiet; the only

living creature, excepting herself and Prince, as she passed through them, being Bär, the great house-dog, who lay in the sunshine, just within the dining-room window. He wagged his tail as she went by, and would have followed her, no doubt, had not his rival been with her; for he and Prince were sworn foes, and seldom met without a scuffle, in which, it must be confessed, the smaller dog was generally the aggressor.

But Lisa had him in her arms now, so nothing ensued beyond a growl on his part, at which Bär blinked contemptuously, and she passed on into the drawing-room, and thence out on to the gravel path before the house. There had been a thunder-storm the night before, which had cleared the air, and the day was very bright and breezy. White fleecy clouds were drifting over the blue sky, borne across by the summer wind; and sunlight and shade played by turns on tree and shrub and lawn. Very beautiful it all looked, but Lisa must have had her thoughts engaged with something else, for she hardly even glanced around, as with head bent down, and slow and thoughtful footsteps, she made her way into the green-walk.

She had sauntered almost to the end of it without once raising her eyes, and might have returned in the same absent manner, had not a short bark from her dog, who was now running on before, made her look up, just as she was on the point of turning; and then, to her great surprise and no little embarrassment, she discovered

that she had come upon her cousin Percy, who was stretched upon one of the long garden benches in the walk. He was quite as unaware of her presence there as she had been of his, and as he had his back to her, and his hat drawn over his eyes, she might have effected her escape unobserved, had not Prince thought proper to attract his attention, first by his bark, and then by jumping upon him in such a state of extravagant delight, that, whatever his meditations might have been, they were speedily put to flight. He raised his hat, and seeing Lisa standing there with a deep blush upon her face, uncertain whether to go or stay, he got up, looking for the moment almost as much embarrassed as she did. It was difficult, indeed, to say which of them was the most so; but she was the first to recover herself, and to break the rather awkward silence.

'What a shame of us to disturb you!' she said; 'but I didn't know you were here. I was thinking of something else, and didn't see you till I was close by. I am very sorry.'

'You didn't disturb me; I was not doing anything. Don't let me drive you away, Lisa; I am not going to stay;' and he took up a book that was lying on the bench. 'You were coming to sit here, were you not?'

Lisa did not say either 'yes' or 'no'—she had no idea indeed, just then, what she had come for, or whether she had even meant to come there at all, and

for a moment or two she was silent; but there were such evident marks of distress and confusion about her, that Percy, although too much of a gentleman to appear to notice them, could not help seeing that, from some cause or other, she was strangely agitated; and thinking she would rather be alone, he began to walk away. But she stopped him.

'Are you obliged to go?' she said, timidly.

'Not if you wish me to stay, Lisa,' and he turned back eagerly. 'Do you want me? Is there anything I can do for you?'

'No, it's not that.' She hesitated, and after two or three attempts to speak, she burst into tears. 'Percy, I don't know what you must have been thinking of me all this time. You know what you did for me, and I have never said a word to you about it. You must have thought me so ungrateful.' Her voice was unsteady, and she could not go on.

'Ungrateful! No, never, Lisa! I never thought so for one moment. Who could ever think such a thing of you?' he said, with a long wistful glance at her tearful and half-averted face. 'And I wanted no thanks; I don't want them now,' with something almost like reproach in his tone as he spoke. 'It was happiness enough for me to know you were safe—that I had saved you. I did not want anything else.' It was said hurriedly, but the low, earnest voice made Lisa tremble.

'I don't know whether you wanted me to thank you

or not,' she said, trying to recover herself, 'but I know I ought to have done so, and that I didn't. I tried to do it two or three times, and I couldn't. I was very silly; I have been silly in a great many things lately,' she added, colouring a good deal, and with the tears still in her eyes; 'but I do thank you now, Percy, and much, much more than I can ever tell you; I shall never forget it as long as I live. I wish you could know all I feel about it.'

Percy took a few hasty strides away, and then he came back again. It was by a strong effort, seemingly, that he controlled himself sufficiently to say, with a half smile—

You can hardly call yourself ungrateful, Lisa, after such thanks as those. But you must know they are not necessary; that—that—I could have done nothing else,' he added, lightly. 'You wouldn't have expected me to stand by and see you burnt to death without trying to help you? No man in the world would have done such a thing.'

'Perhaps not. I don't know. Nobody did help me, though,' said Lisa, with a shudder at the recollection of those few terrible moments. 'They might have done so afterwards. I dare say they would; but then you know while they were waiting, it might have been too late. You were the only person, Percy, who did what you could directly; and you saved me. No, you may say what you like, but I shall think of it as long as

I live, and I shall always feel I can never thank you half enough. And you don't know how sorry I am about that.' She was looking at his hand as she spoke.

He looked down at it too, and then he smiled again; a little proudly this time, though he said, carelessly,

'It's not worth being sorry for, Lisa; it never was, and certainly not now. I can use it again nearly as well as ever, you see.' And then, as if he thought that quite enough had been said upon the subject, he added, rather abruptly, 'And that was all you wanted me for?'

'Yes.' She hesitated; she would have given a great deal to be able to say more, to give some explanation of what must have seemed to him such capricious conduct lately on her part, but she could not do it; she felt she must leave that alone, and let him think what he liked about it. 'Yes,' with a sigh, 'that was all I wanted. I haven't said much—not what I wished to say, but it isn't because I don't feel it. And it wasn't because I was ungrateful that I never thanked you before. I don't know exactly how it was—I never saw you alone, that was one reason, I believe; and I was so silly, I couldn't say anything before other people. But I couldn't go away and let you go on thinking me ungrateful; and perhaps I sha'n't see you again for a week or two,' she said, speaking very fast. 'We are going to Copelands to-morrow, you know.'

'Yes, so Mary told me; she says you have not been well lately.' And Percy, who the moment he had seen

her the night before had noticed her altered looks, was watching her with some anxiety now. 'I hope the change will do you good, Lisa; I am sure you want it.' There was not much in the words, but a great deal in the tone, for it was just the way in which he used to speak in the happy days not long ago, when he was caring and thinking so much for her, and the tears rushed to Lisa's eyes. She sat down on the bench, and took out her work to hide her agitation, though she remarked at the same time, rather hastily, that she didn't think there was much the matter with her; the hot weather had made her head ache, but that was all, she should be quite well again when it was cooler;' and then she began to work very fast, while Percy, who seemed to be making up his mind to say something, stood by her for a few moments in silence.

'I am afraid, Lisa, we shall not see much more of each other at all,' he began at last with evident effort. 'You go to Copelands to-morrow, and I shall only be here a day or two longer myself. I shall be leaving on Saturday.'

'Leaving!' The work fell from her hands, and she looked up with a very white face.

'Yes,' he went on, hurriedly, without even glancing at her. 'I am going to Scotland then; and I shall be away for two or three months, I expect—most likely as long as my leave lasts. I don't think I shall return here—not to stay at any rate.'

The words came out with difficulty, and there was a long silence afterwards, for Lisa's head was bent down over her work again, and she made no reply. Perhaps he had hoped to hear her express some regret at what must have seemed to her such a sudden resolution on his part— to hear her say that she was sorry he was going. A short time ago he knew she would have done so, but now she was silent; she made no remark of any kind. The open, warm-hearted Lisa whom he had known so short a time back was changed now to him in every way, and her apparent indifference cut him to the heart. But after a pause of some minutes, he said, with forced quietness:

'Yes, I am afraid we shall not see much more of each other. We have had some very pleasant days together, and I wish they could have lasted a little longer. But perhaps it is better not; better they should have come to an end as they have done. The last few months have been so very happy to me, that I am afraid I was beginning to care too much for my home; and that does not do for a soldier, you know; he has no business to care for one place more than another, so it is quite as well that I should be going.'

There was no answer still from Lisa. Her head was bent lower and lower, but she made no attempt to speak.

'But I shall never forget you, Lisa,' he went on in a low voice. 'You don't mind my telling you that, do you? You don't mind my saying that I shall always

remember you? We are cousins, so I suppose we may be allowed to care for each other a little. I shall always think of you; and wherever you are or whatever you are doing, I hope I shall always hear you are happy. And, Lisa, can we not say good-bye as friends?—friends such as we used to be, I mean. Something has come between us lately; but whatever it has been, can't we forget it now, and make the most of this last day? It may be very long before we have another together.'

Poor Lisa! With those last words the hard-fought struggle that until then she had kept up with her feelings came to an end, and she burst into a flood of most bitter weeping, so bitter and passionate, that Percy was first startled, and then alarmed; though even then so little idea had he of what was passing in her mind, and of the real state of her feelings towards him, that he was as far as possible from conjecturing the true cause of her distress. He could only imagine that something in his words had given her pain—implied reproach perhaps—or conveyed some meaning which he had never intended; and sitting down by her side (forgetful for the time how much she had lately avoided and shrunk from him), he entreated to be told what he had said to grieve her; repeating over and over again that whatever it was, it had been unintentional—that he would not have given her pain for worlds; while every word he said, spoken as it was in the old familiar tones which she had learned to know and love so well, only made her at first cry the

more. She was such a child, and she felt so utterly desolate at the thought of his leaving her, that her grief for the time was uncontrollable, and all power to restrain her tears was gone. But she seemed to recollect herself at length, and making a strong effort, she checked her convulsive sobbing; though still to all his entreaties to be told what was distressing her she only shook her head, and he could get nothing from her but that 'it was not his fault, he couldn't help it—she was foolish, that was all.'

'That is all! but, Lisa, I must surely have said something—something you didn't like. You would never be in such distress if nothing were the matter. What is it? Won't you tell me?' And then, as she was still silent, keeping her face hidden, a new light began by degrees to break in upon him; though the thought seemed at first too wild, too utterly impossible, to be cherished for one moment. Wild as it was, however, when it had once come, it was hard to put it away again, and her strange silence and unexplained distress appeared to give some colour to it. He sat for some moments doubtful and irresolute, but at last he said, in a low voice,

'Lisa, can it really be anything to you whether I go or stay? Is it that is making you unhappy now?'

He was trembling between hope and fear; but even then she could give no answer. He hardly wanted one, however; for although her face was turned away, he could see that she was crying again most bitterly.

'If I thought you wished me to stay, Lisa, I would not go,' he said, but even then scarcely daring to hope.

'You wouldn't go?' and she raised her head and for a moment looked at him with a child's face of eagerness and unexpected joy, but the next she turned away again with deepening colour.

'No; not if you wished me to stay. Lisa, I will tell you the truth. It was only on your account I was going; only because I wanted to get away from you; because—because I love you so much that I could not stay where I thought there was no chance of my winning your love in return; but if I thought there was—' He looked at her, but she neither moved nor spoke. 'Lisa, I have loved you ever since I first saw you; and I have loved you all the time almost without hope—once I had a little, but not much, and it was soon gone again, for I felt what a difference there was between us, in age and character and everything else, and I thought it was madness to ask you to think of me as anything but a cousin and a friend. Whether I have any right to ask it now I don't know. You must tell me. Something in your manner makes me think that perhaps I am not hoping for an impossibility; but if I am—if I have been mistaken—Lisa, dear Lisa, will you tell me? Will you say whether I may stay, and hope that some day you may be able to love me as much as I love you?'

Lisa was looking another way, her face all hot and

burning, and the hand which lay in his was trembling in his grasp; but she did not try now as she had done once before to free herself, and she seemed struggling to speak, though it was a long time before words came. And he waited, stilling his impatience as best he might, until she turned round at last and looked up at him through her tears.

'I can't help it; you are not like anybody else to me. Oh, Percy, don't go away and leave me!' And child-like in her love and confidence, she hid her face on his arm as if sure of finding there the shelter and protection that she wanted.

An hour later they were still sitting together in the same place, but all Lisa's tears were gone then. Her face was flushed indeed, but it was with happiness, and though her eyes were downcast, they were joyously bright. In that short time a change seemed to her to have come over everything, and the whole world looked radiant. The sunshine, which, when she had first come that way, she had thought dim and clouded, now danced and flickered through the leaves and fell at her feet in a shower of beauty; and the voice of the summer wind, which not long ago had sounded full of sadness, came laden with a music of its own, and seemed to tell of one lasting dream of happiness. It was hard to realise that she was the same Lisa who before had felt so lonely and hopeless; or even that she was the same who, in her most light-hearted and unthinking days, had always felt that

something was wanting—that she was homeless and without parents, and that on no one in the world had she any particular claim.

For that desolate feeling was gone now; it would never come back. She had found some one who was to be everything to her—father, mother, brother, and sister, all in one; some one to whom she was the very first and the very dearest—who would care for her and love her all through her life, and shield her from all trouble and sorrow.

Poor Lisa, it was a very bright dream, and it would have been hard, then, to persuade her that perhaps it might not last; that human affection, strong and tried as it might be, could not be all in all to her, and that its very intensity and devotion might be the channels through which grief and trial were to visit her. She was too young to have any such doubts and misgivings; and she was so very happy sitting there by Percy's side, listening to all he had to tell her of his past doubts and fears, of his deep passionate love and the bright future he would make for her, that she had no thoughts to give to other and darker fancies. She had so much, too, to tell him in return; and although it was not very coherent, and only came out in bits and snatches, as if she hardly liked to think of what had made her so miserable, yet she managed by degrees to tell him everything—how and when she had first discovered he was not the brother she had always taken him for,

how frightened she had been when she found it out, and how much afraid lest others should find it out too; how, above all, she had dreaded his knowing what her feelings were; and how, in trying to hide them, she had overdone her part, and had somehow contrived to make both herself and him very unhappy. She could not bear to think of it, even now when it was all over: those last four weeks had been so very wretched. But they were over, and there was no need to remember them. What was the use of it indeed, as he said? why should they make themselves miserable about the past when their mistake had come to an end, and they had found out what they were to each other? though this latter fact was one which he could hardly yet realise as far as her feelings towards him were concerned. He seemed to fear, indeed, that she scarcely even understood them herself; that she did not know her own mind upon the subject, or the promise she was making. That Lisa, bright, joyous, and beautiful, so unlike himself in every way, should have given her affections to him, appeared almost incredible. He feared lest at some future time she might repent her choice.

'Are you sure, dearest, that you know what you are doing? I am afraid you have hardly thought enough about it, and of the great difference there is between us in everything. You forget how old and grave I am; a great deal too old and grave for you, Lisa; you ought to have chosen some one more like yourself. And then,

too,' smiling a little, 'I am not good-looking—not in the least; are you sure you can put up with me as I am? I am afraid you must have forgotten that—'

'Percy, that isn't generous of you!' Lisa exclaimed, growing crimson in a moment. 'And it was so very, very long ago that I said that! You don't think I think it now. It was in my foolish days, before I knew or cared anything about you. And I had forgotten all about it—forgotten I had even thought it—till Susan reminded me of it that day at dinner; and then I was miserable. Percy, you would never talk in that way if you knew how unhappy it makes me.'

'Well, I will not, dearest; though I don't know why it should make you unhappy. But, Lisa, what I fear is that you should some day find you have made a mistake—that you should find there is a greater difference between us than you think now—that I am not suited for you. I would rather you should think of these things now. I would rather you should recall your promise while you can, than feel at any future time that I am not the person who could have made you happiest.' His voice faltered, and he looked at her anxiously as he spoke. 'You are so young, so pretty, and so winning, that I feel as if you were not made for me. There is nothing about me that can please anybody; and I am afraid you must be mistaken in thinking you can ever care for me. I don't know of any one thing, indeed, to make up for all I want, except it is my

love for you. That is as true and deep as any you could ever find; you might go all the world over and not meet with anyone who would love you as I do; and if that would make up for other things—'

'Percy,' and Lisa sat up and looked at him with a very bright colour, but with clear steady eyes, 'will you listen to me for one minute? I want to tell you something, and you are to believe it; for it is the truth —the very real truth. I wouldn't have you different from what you are for anything you could give me. I like your being so much older and graver than I am, because I like to look up to you, and I like to feel you are wiser and better than I am. And as for you not being handsome, that is as people think; *I* think you are handsome; good-looking at least, and that is better than handsome. And it is a very long time since I have thought so, though I didn't when I first saw you. And I don't want to have you different in any one thing; for if you were, you wouldn't be the Percy whom I have known all this time; and whom I—' she hesitated and coloured still more deeply. 'Won't you believe me? It is all true, indeed; and I don't like to hear you say such things. I won't hear them; I never will; and I won't take back my promise. Please, Percy, never say anything of that sort again; it makes me miserable. Promise me you will never talk in that way any more.'

She laid her hand in his, her earnest wistful look saying even more than her words, and Percy's last lin-

gering doubts were gone then. And Lisa saw he believed and trusted her, and she was very happy. She seemed to have forgotten everything else in the joy of that last hour, and was quite unconscious of the lapse of time—almost even of where she was; the only thing indeed of which she was at all sure, was that she was sitting somewhere with him, and that there was a great deal of sunshine about them—heart's sunshine it must have been more than any other, for the afternoon shadows were growing long, and the thick foliage above them shut out all but a few straggling, wavering beams of light. The first thing that brought her back to outward realities was the sound of footsteps on the other side of the wall—footsteps coming up to a gate close by, which opened into the adjoining churchyard. There was nothing very alarming in the sound, for the pathway that led through the churchyard saved a round of two or three minutes' walk through the street, and her uncle often came in that way when he had been making any of his visits on foot. Of course the step now was his; but although she knew this well enough, Lisa started as she heard it, and the turning of the key in the door.

'It's only my father; you are not going to run away from him?' Percy exclaimed, trying to detain her as she made a frightened movement.

'Yes, I am; I can't see him. Oh, Percy, don't hold me so tight; please let me go;' and freeing herself

from him, she was on the point of making her escape, when the door was opened, and she found herself stopped by Dr. Tennent, who caught her as she was passing him.

'Well, my little girl, what are you doing?' he began, 'and where are you running so fast? You look as if—' And then seeing Percy, he stopped short suddenly, with a long look, first at him, and again at Lisa, whose tell-tale face of blushes and confusion must in some measure have prepared him for what was coming.

'Why, Percy, what is the meaning of this?' and although there was nothing in his tone to indicate displeasure—rather the contrary, indeed—Lisa felt that she could not wait to hear the explanation that must be given.

'Please let me go, uncle Henry, won't you?' she said, in such imploring accents that they were not to be resisted.

He looked at her once more with an odd smile, and then released her.

'I understand. Get along with you. And now, Percy, let me hear what you have to say.'

And as he turned to his son, Lisa made her escape in good earnest, and rushed back to the house.

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. TENNENT SPEAKS HER MIND.

IT was not very long afterwards when Mary, who was still sitting in her room busy with the work she had undertaken, heard the door behind her open very softly, and some one come stealing in as if half afraid of being seen. Noiseless as the step was that crossed the floor, she recognised it at once; there was no other like it in the house—no other so light and fairy-like. Percy, indeed, often said that there was a kind of rhythm in Lisa's walk—that she moved in fancy to some perpetual tune; and Mary could have thought the same, though the tune just then was a slower one than usual.

'I am glad you are come,' she said, without looking up; 'I was not able to get out, you see, for this has taken longer than I thought it would, and it is getting very late now. It must be past tea-time—will you ring the bell, dear?'

Lisa hesitated for a moment, and then instead of doing as she was asked, she came up behind her cousin's chair, and stood there for a minute or two

without speaking. A little surprised, at last, Mary half turned.

'Why, Lisa dear, what have you been doing?' catching a glimpse of her face. 'How hot you are! Where have you been?'

'Only in the garden—in the green walk.' And Lisa twisted and untwisted 'Penelope's web,' quite unconscious of the state to which that interesting piece of virtù was being reduced by the process.

'Only in the garden! But what have you been doing there? Is anything the matter?'

'Anything the matter? No, oh no! It's only that—that——" and coming round then, and kneeling down by her cousin's side, she hid her face in her lap. 'Mary, dear, I was with Percy, and—and he told me something. Can you guess what it was?'

There was a moment's silence; but it could not have been because Mary was altogether unprepared for what she heard; for although her brother had never spoken to her of his attachment, she had long had her suspicions of it. She had not by any means, however, been so sure of Lisa's feelings with regard to him. She was so much in the habit, indeed, of looking upon her cousin as a mere child, and of seeing everyone else do the same, that she had never been able to suppose such a thing as likely to become serious; and even had it seemed to her less impossible than it did, Lisa's own con-

duct lately, which had not passed altogether unnoticed by her, had made her fear that her brother's chances of success at any time would be very small. That he should have dreamed of trying now seemed to her inexplicable, and her cousin's hidden face gave her no clue as to what her answer had been. For a moment she was silent, and then she bent down, stroking Lisa's hair caressingly.

'What was it, my darling? I can guess what he said to you, but I don't know about you, Lisa—I don't know what you told him.'

Lisa raised her head and looked up for a minute very shyly; 'Not know! Oh, Mary! And when he is better than anybody else in all the world—when there is nobody like him!'

She hid her face again, but Mary's warm, delighted embrace was sympathy itself.

'Dear Lisa, I am so glad—so happy! But I didn't know before; I thought you didn't care for him. I am so pleased, dear—so very happy!'

'So am I,' Lisa murmured. 'I am afraid I am too happy, Mary—it seems almost wrong to feel as I do. And when I have been so silly too, all this time—so cross and miserable—it hardly seems right I should be so happy now:' the latter part of the sentence being a sort of soliloquy to herself, but Mary overheard it. She smiled a little.

'That was it, was it, Lisa? And that is what has

been making you look so pale lately, I suppose. I thought there was something the matter, besides the hot weather; though I couldn't guess what it was. But I was quite sure something was wrong—that you were unhappy.'

'Were you?' Lisa said, in some confusion. 'I didn't know I showed it. I meant to keep it all to myself, and I thought I did. I was very silly: but I was so afraid—so afraid lest he should find out that—that—I couldn't tell, you know, that he would ever think of me.'

'Couldn't you?' said Mary, still smiling, but quite able to understand, even from those few words, the why and the wherefore of much that had lately puzzled her in her cousin's conduct. 'Well, it is all over now, dear, at any rate, and you need not trouble yourself about it again. You will be very happy, my darling—I am sure Percy will make you so; and I am so glad to know it!—it will make all the difference to me, to feel you are with some one who will care for you as he will. It makes me so very happy, too, that you have really learned to know him, and have found out what he is worth! You thought at one time, Lisa, you should never like him: do you remember that? I always hoped you would, though I'm not sure I ever thought of its coming to this:' an assertion which any one who knew Mary would have readily believed, for

she certainly had never in all her life been guilty, even in imagination, of anything approaching to match-making. 'And, Lisa, you know what I think of my brother. You don't want me to tell you what you have heard so often.'

'No, I know it all;' and Lisa raised her head a little proudly, with a smile. 'But then I think it too, myself; I know it's all true. And, Mary dear, I must make him very happy. I wonder whether I shall—I'm half afraid. I'm such a little thing, and I don't know much—perhaps he won't find me what he expects, and then I should be miserable—I couldn't be happy, for I should know I wasn't making him so. I wish I were better, and knew a great deal more than I do. Oh, Mary, suppose he should be disappointed in me after all!'

'Not much fear of that, dearest—he is not taking you on trust, you know. You have known each other so long now—it is not as if you were strangers. Besides, you need not stand still, Lisa—you can grow wiser and better every day if you like; and you have plenty of time before you to do it in. You are young enough yet—you may always go on improving.'

'Yes, so I may—I'll try, Mary,' was the answer, in a very thoughtful tone; and, with her head still resting on her cousin's knee, Lisa fell into a long reverie.

'And so, Miss Lisa,' began her uncle, when some time afterwards he sent for her into the library,—

'And so Percy has been persuading you that he is the very best person in the world to have the care of you—that you will be a great deal happier with him than you are here. Is it true? He has been asking me to make you over to him, but I am sure I don't know what to say to such a thing. I don't think I can part with you just yet.' He put his arm round her as she stood by the side of his chair, and drew her very close to him. 'You must tell me what you think about it yourself, my child. Is it really what you wish?'

Lisa nestled still closer to him, and then she stole a curiously wistful, timid glance at Percy, who was standing near.

'I shall not like leaving you, Uncle Henry;' and her voice faltered a little. 'You have always been so kind to me—but—he asked me, you know—I couldn't say what wasn't true, and ——" She hid her face.

Dr. Tennent smiled. 'Which means, I suppose, that you think as he does—that you believe all he has been telling you, and are quite ready to trust yourself to him. So, in that case, of course there is nothing left for me to do but to tell him he may have you. And mind you keep your promise, Percy, and take good care of her; for if you don't make her happy, I shall never forgive you.'

What Percy's answer was no one knew exactly. It

was not coherent by any means; but Lisa's confiding smile, as she looked up at him through her tears, told that she had no need of words to assure her of what she already knew so well. She could trust herself with him anywhere, and to go through anything; and her face all that evening was one of very quiet, but perfect happiness, undisturbed by a single doubt or cloud. She had not even a misgiving as to how the fact of her engagement might be received by the aunt of whom, in general, she stood so much in dread. There was such a sense of protection about her now, that she gave no thought to what at any other time would have caused her so much uneasiness, but rested satisfied with the feeling that her attachment was sanctioned and approved by those whom she most loved and cared for.

Whether Dr. Tennent's feelings of satisfaction, when he came to think over what had passed, were of quite so unmixed a nature, was doubtful. For the first time, during the reign of his present wife, he had done something in their mutual province without her consent, and, moreover, without even having consulted her upon the subject; and he began, by degrees, to have sundry suspicions that she might not altogether approve of what had taken place during her absence that day. There was nothing for it, however, but to get through his revelations as soon as possible, and make the best of them; and when she returned, late

that evening, and everybody but themselves was gone to bed, he began at once; dashing into the middle of the subject, without giving himself time to think how he could best prepare her for what was coming, or even giving her any preparation at all.

'My dear, I don't know what you will say to it, but here's Percy been making little Lisa an offer to-day. They've fallen in love with each other, it seems—very odd it is—but I don't know how we could have helped it—so it will have to be a match, I believe.'

It was such a very abrupt piece of intelligence, that Mrs. Tennent, who was clearing away some things for the night, and was in the act of lifting a work-box as her husband spoke, stopped short suddenly at the announcement, and in her utter astonishment the box slipped from her hands, coming down with a crash on the floor, and its contents rolling off in all directions. But she did not even look at them.

'Percy, Lisa? What are you talking about, Dr. Tennent?' she said sharply. 'What on earth do you mean?'

'Just what I say, my dear,' said the doctor, fidgeting. 'It is odd, certainly. I don't wonder you are surprised. I was myself; but still there is no harm in it—quite the contrary, I should say,' he added a little more boldly. 'It will not be a bad thing for either of them, I think—there can be no objection, indeed,' rather [redacted] again.

'Dr. Tennent, are you perfectly out of your senses?' exclaimed his wife angrily. 'Do you at all know what you are saying? You surely don't mean you would ever let that child make such an engagement. Think of her age! It is ridiculous—absurd! impossible! And you actually talk as if it might be something serious!'

'Well, my dear, as far as that goes, I am afraid it is,' said the doctor, looking very guilty. 'I had no idea you would have such a strong objection to it, and—to tell the truth—it's all settled. When Percy asked me, I couldn't do anything else but consent; I saw no reason against it. I am sorry you have such a dislike to it, but it can't be helped now. It's too late to refuse, so you must make the best of it.'

'Dr. Tennent, I never should have thought you could be so foolish,' was his wife's short rejoinder, in a tone of great bitterness. She was evidently too indignant for further remark; and the doctor gave a sigh, most probably of relief, that the first burst was over. Perhaps also he thought it as well she should have leisure to digest the idea just suggested; for he took the charge of foolishness very quietly, and for some minutes made no reply of any kind, but sat casting furtive glances at her, while she stood with lips compressed and brow bent, in anything but a soft or pleasant mood. Presently, however, he said—

'I can't think, my dear, why you should object to it—it seems to me the very best thing that could possibly have happened. We shall be glad to know that poor little Lisa is provided for; and Percy can well afford to marry now, and make his wife comfortable. He might have done so before, indeed, if he liked, as he has that money of his mother's, besides his pay: but I suppose he never saw anyone to please him. He is fastidious, and expects so much.'

'It looks like it, when he chooses that child,' was Mrs. Tennent's comment; but the doctor prudently disregarded the interruption.

'I was beginning to think he never meant to marry at all—he has been so long thinking about it, and always looked so grave whenever I spoke of his doing so. I was afraid he had had a disappointment and couldn't get over it, or something of the sort. However, it's all right now, and really I don't see that he could have done better. Lisa has no money, to be sure; but she is very pretty, and very loving and affectionate. She will make him a good wife; and though there is a good deal of difference in their ages, it is on the right side. And if she has no objection to him on that account, I don't know why we need make one. And, my dear, she really loves him, there can be no doubt about it!'

'Ridiculous!' responded Mrs. Tennent. 'The idea of a child like her thinking of such things; I wonder [redacted] they got into her head!'

'I suppose Percy put them there,' said the doctor drily. 'They have been together so much all the summer, that I am not surprised at its coming to this. Now we know about it, it seems the most natural thing in the world; though I must say I was very much astonished at first—simply, I believe, because I had never given it a thought before.'

'I beg your pardon,' said his wife, 'I don't see that it was at all the most natural thing to happen. Percy is so very much older than she is, and so very different in every respect, that it always seemed to me impossible for him to think of her: I gave him credit, indeed, for more sense. If it had been Mr. Thorpe, now! I did once think *he* was going too far—paying her too much attention—and she is very forward; she encouraged him. You may shake your head, Dr. Tennent, but you don't know what Lisa is. I was obliged to look after her then—keep a very strict watch over her till he went; but I never imagined Percy would be so foolish. He is like all the rest of the men, though: taken with a pretty face, and never giving a thought to other and more important things. I declare it is incredible to me to see the way you all go on! And what business Lisa has to be falling in love at her age, I can't think; so wrong, so utterly improper it is! It would have been time enough six years hence for her to be troubling herself about anything of the sort. But of course Percy does not think so. He

will be persuading you next into letting her marry him before half that time is over. I shouldn't be surprised, indeed, to hear that he has done so already.' And Mrs. Tennent fixed her eyes upon her husband with a keen, searching glance, which was not very favourable to any confession he might be disposed to make. He moved uneasily in his chair.

'Half six—that's three.' 'I don't know, my dear, but—I don't fancy he is inclined to wait so long as that. Indeed'—he spoke rather uneasily, and it was evidently only dire necessity which obliged him at last to come out with — 'I don't think, from what he says, that he wishes to wait at all. He would like to marry at once, I believe, and take her away with him when he leaves us.'

There was a long silence after this avowal, for Mrs. Tennent stood speechless and motionless; and the doctor, glad to have the whole thing off his mind, and relieved to find that no immediate burst of anger followed the communication, stretched himself out and felt with much pleasure that the worst was over. He was in the habit, sometimes, of taking a nap in his easy chair before going to bed, and he seemed disposed to do so now, thinking doubtless, also, that it might be just as well if his wife were to sleep on the news she had heard. A night's rest would help her to take more quietly, and when she woke up in the to find things inevitable, she would begin

to look upon them as matters of course, and all would go on smoothly. If he could have had his own way, not another word would have been said on the subject; but this was not what Mrs. Tennent intended.

'And pray may I ask what you said to this fine plan?' she began again with bitter sarcasm, after a few minutes' pause. 'Not that it is very necessary, though, to make enquiry; for of course you gave your consent—you would not think of doing anything else.'

'Well, I certainly did not say "no," my dear. I didn't know, indeed, why I should. Lisa is rather young, certainly; but Percy is not: and although it would be all very well for her to wait, it would not do for him, and I can quite understand his not wishing it. You must see that it is not as if he were just starting in his profession, and had his way to make in it—he has done all that—and when a man can keep a wife, and has made his choice, the sooner he marries the better, in my opinion. And really, my dear, it will be a good thing for poor little Lisa to get a home and be so well provided for. I should have done something for her, of course; but it could not have been much, with all our own children to think of. And then, too, you must remember that you always said she was to go out when she was eighteen: I never saw the necessity for it myself; I should have thought she could have stayed here, and have been happy with the

others; but you said it was to be—so I suppose it would have been. And most decidedly this is a far better thing for her, poor child—she will be much happier than if she were a governess, living among strangers; and after all it is only parting with her a little sooner. It will make very little difference in any way.'

'Excuse me, I think it will make an immense difference. Two years is an age at Lisa's time of life—just the time, too, when a girl's character is being formed, and she is learning most of everything. Besides, whoever heard of turning out a child like her to act for herself? Eighteen would have been very early for her to leave home under any circumstances; and I should never have thought of such a thing for her, had I not felt quite sure she would do so much better away from the Priory than if she stayed with us. Having the care of others might have helped her to teach and discipline herself—but going in this sort of way ——!'

'Is a very different thing, certainly, my dear,' added the doctor, unable, in spite of his wife's displeasure, quite to restrain his own satisfaction. 'It seems to me much better in every respect. She will be so much happier. I could never before bear the idea of the poor child having no home, and being always thrown among strangers. It will make all the difference in the world to me, to know she has some one to look after her and take care of her. And even if anything

happens to Percy, she will be provided for. He settles all his mother's mone yon her; and that would always keep her above want, even if he were not able to do anything more for her. But he will insure his life also; they will not live at much expense of course: Lisa, fortunately, has not been brought up to anything of the sort, and will not expect it; and he knows what he is about. They may be very comfortable if they like, with a little care. And, indeed, Helen, I can't help thinking that it is a very good thing for her, poor dear child. We must feel thankful she is so soon provided for.'

'Very well, Dr. Tennent,' said his wife coldly; 'that is your opinion, but it is not mine. As you and Percy, however, both seem to have made up your minds on the subject, of course it is useless for me to say any more about it. You will do as you please, I suppose, without consulting me in any way. I will tell you once for all, though, what I think about it; and that is, that the whole thing is perfect folly from beginning to end, and I never could have imagined that Percy would show so little sense as he is doing now. Lisa is no more fit to be married than she is to take the charge of the whole country. What does she know about the management of a house, or the proper way of spending money, or anything else that a woman ought to know when she gets a home of her own? She has had no time to learn, even if she had wished to

do so, and she knows nothing about the ways of the world, for of course she has never been out at all. A nice mess she will make of everything! and if Percy does not find before six months are over that he has made a great mistake, I shall be very much astonished. The idea of marrying a child like her! So utterly thoughtless and careless as she is—so far from being ever likely to make a good wife! He will spoil her, of course; and she will go out a great deal, and get plenty of admiration, which is all she cares for, and they will both end by being miserable. Well, he will have no one to thank for it but himself—and you, Dr. Tennent, —for mind, that the thing is done without my consent. I disapprove of it most thoroughly—and so I shall tell Percy. He shall not say, at any rate, he has not been warned.'

'Very well, my dear,' said the doctor, who was making futile attempts to appear half asleep. 'Do as you like. Of course you can tell him what you please—but I don't suppose it will make much difference. You must not be disappointed if he should not take your advice.'

'Of course I shall not be disappointed, for I don't expect him to do so. I shall speak for my own satisfaction, and to feel I have done my duty—not that I suppose, in the least, that anything I can say will have any effect, or make him see the desirability of waiting a few years and giving Lisa a better chance of improving

herself, and becoming more fitted in every way for her duties. There is one thing, however, I shall insist upon; and that is, that things shall be left just as they are until she comes back from Copelands. I will not hear another word said about it till then, nor have it mentioned to anyone. It is my particular desire, Dr. Tennent,' she added in a louder tone. 'I hope you will remember that for the present I don't wish to have it spoken of anywhere, or to anybody: and I shall tell Percy the same.'

No answer from the doctor, unless, indeed a sort of grunt might be taken for an assent to his wife's wishes. She seemed to consider it as such, at any rate; and without further remark, she took up a candle and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HAPPY DAYS.

MRS. TENNENT'S air of displeasure the following morning at the breakfast-table was sufficiently marked to make it quite apparent that something was wrong, and to throw a slightly uncomfortable feeling upon everybody present—the chief culprit perhaps excepted. Lisa was too happy—too much absorbed in her own thoughts—to be at all influenced by external circumstances; and although aware of her aunt's annoyance, and fully conscious also of the cause of it, it had no power to cast even a passing shadow over the brightness of her spirit. She was very silent, it was true; but it was no fear or misgiving that kept her so—only a strange mixture of shy but very happy feelings. But, quietly as she sat in her usual corner, seldom raising her eyes, and hardly joining at all in what went on, there was no mistaking the radiant expression of her face. It was such a contrast to the worn and harassed look it had worn for some time previously, that the change could scarcely fail to be noticed; and it shortly elicited the remark from Arthur, that 'the

mere prospect of Copelands pleasures, and Mrs. Pye's good cheer, seemed to be exhilarating; for Lisa was getting quite 'perky' already—unless, indeed, she had only been shamming before to get a holiday, as he more than half suspected.'

Lisa laughed, but it was in some little confusion, which was not diminished a minute or two afterwards, when something being said about Percy's leaving on the Saturday, he answered very quietly that he was not going then—he was not going to Scotland at all.

'Not going to Scotland at all!' exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once, while Mrs. Tennent looked graver and sterner than ever, and the doctor buried himself behind the 'Times,' and seemed absorbed in its contents. Lisa's crimson face fortunately escaped notice in the excitement produced by what appeared such an extraordinary announcement.

'Not going to Scotland!' repeated Arthur. 'What's the meaning of that? I thought it was a settled thing —that you were booked for two months at least, and had only come home again to get one more glimpse of your bereaved relatives, and make your last will and testament before imperilling your life in a war with the grouse. You don't mean to say you give *them* up! It's a moral impossibility!'

'And what will the Wilsons say?' remarked Isabel. 'You have no reason for not going, have you? It is only a whim of yours, and a very strange one, I think.'

She looked at him curiously, but his countenance defied penetration. 'They won't like it, I'm sure—it is so odd to make an engagement of that sort and then break it without any cause at all.'

He half-smiled. 'I only made it to suit myself, and now I've changed my mind. I don't care to go.'

'But that is such a foolish reason—they will be offended, you may be quite sure.'

'Not the least fear of it. I wrote to Wilson last night.'

'But the grouse!' interposed Arthur. 'What a chance, and to let it go begging! By George, if I could be off to the moors with a gun on my shoulder, you wouldn't see me back in a hurry. And he looks as if he had never seen a bird in his life, or heard the sound of a shot. Well, such indifference beats me, I must confess. I don't understand it, or what attraction you have found in Atherstone to keep you here just at this particular time—unless indeed—' and struck apparently by some bright thought, Arthur looked at his cousin with a peculiar smile. 'It's not a settled thing yet, is it? Well, she's not a bad-looking girl either—not pretty certainly, but very pleasant—I rather admire your taste, do you know. Is it all fixed, or will congratulations at present be premature?'

'Rather so; considering that I don't at all know whom you are talking about. Susan, what time are you to Copelands? I think I shall walk over there

with you.' And as Percy rose from the table as he spoke, the rest of the party began to break up too; Arthur retiring through the window to whistle and meditate on the lawn with his hands in his pockets, and the others dispersing to their several occupations.

The walk to Copelands had to be accomplished before the heat of the day came on, so that no time was to be lost in setting off; and Lisa, who was ready long before the others, willingly acceded to Percy's proposal of going on by themselves. She only ran to say good-bye to everybody; to Mary last of all; bestowing on her almost as many hugs and kisses as if she had been leaving her for ten years instead of only ten days, with the prospect of seeing her almost as many times in the interim; and then she ran down to join Percy in the hall, where he had been waiting for her with no little impatience. They set off together, walking silently enough through the long street in which the Priory stood; but when they got beyond the town and out on the high road, which at that time of the morning was very quiet, he turned to her with a smile and drew her arm within his. She looked up at him then with frank childlike happiness, which she saw no need to conceal; for although she had no wish to let every one see what she was feeling, she had not much idea of reserve with those whom she loved. To be with him now at any time must always be a great pleasure to her; and why should he not know it—why should she not show that

she liked it? She did not want him to think she did not care for it, when it was the one thing of all others she liked best; and she walked on talking very brightly and simply—telling him how glad she was their old days had come back, and that they could say just what they pleased to each other again, and be just as happy as they used to be; only that things would be even better now than before, because nothing could ever come between them again, or make them forget how much they cared for each other. The walk seemed a very short one; but it was only to be the first of many others while she was at Copelands, for of course he should come over every day, he said—and before he left her that morning, he gave her a very pretty pearl ring which he told her he wanted her to wear.

She had never had such a thing before, and she coloured between surprise and delight. 'What a little beauty! But—' and she looked at it doubtfully. 'Did you get it on purpose for me, Percy?'

'Yes, dearest, I did. Why, don't you wish to have it?'

'Oh yes; it's not that—But—I have never worn anything of the sort, you know. I am not sure whether aunt Helen will like it. She wouldn't even let me have a brooch to fasten my handkerchief, and I don't know what she will say to a ring!' She looked at it again evidently in much perplexity.

He smiled. 'My dear Lisa, she can't treat you

as a child any longer. She won't say anything when she hears I have given it to you. And I wish you particularly to wear it. Won't you do so to please me?'

She smiled too, then. 'Of course I will if you wish it,' she said, slipping it on her finger. 'And I won't lose it. That is a grand promise for me to make, Percy, because I always do lose everything; but then that is because I don't think about things. Now this will be different; I can't forget this, because you have given it me, and I shall take great care of it.'

And if that day were to be taken as a sample of what others were to be, Lisa stood in no danger of losing her ring through forgetfulness; for long after Percy had left her, she stood turning it round and round upon her finger, and lost in thought. It must have been very pleasant thought, for there was a bright smile upon her face all the time; and whenever she looked at it afterwards, which was very often, the smile always came back. She did not take it off even when she went to bed that night; and once when she half woke up, wondering where she was, and only dimly recollecting what had passed in those last two days, she felt to see that it was really there and assure herself that her happiness was not all a dream.

They were pleasant joyous days that followed. The early rising, long before the world in general was up, the visits to the farmyard and dairy, where she helped

to milk the cows, skim the cream and churn the butter, the races in the meadows with Susan and Constance, and the coming back to breakfast all so hungry that Mrs. Pye's table, laden as it was, seemed as if it could hardly furnish enough to satisfy their appetites; the hundred other employments, and pleasures too, in the orchard, farm, and garden, which she had always found so delightful before, were just as charming now as they had always been. Though Percy had said she was no longer a child, she was still enough of one to enjoy these things as much as she had ever done; only that through all, and over and above everything else, there was the thought of the one great happiness which was so new to her. That thought, indeed, was never absent from her mind—it was her last conscious one at night, the first to greet her in the morning; and it was with her all day long, bringing the light to her eye and life to her step; brightening the hours when he was away from her, and making those she spent with him the most joyous she had ever known.

He was very often there—every morning, in short—coming over immediately after breakast, which at the Priory was by no means so early an affair as at Copelands, and getting there to find Lisa on the look-out for him; walking up and down the lane by which he must come, and always meeting him with the most winning [illegible]miles for a welcome, and making no attempt to [illegible]l the intense pleasure which it gave her to be

with him. And then came long talks and long rides together; for, remembering her delight in this latter exercise, one of his first thoughts had been to find means for gratifying it; and as Mr. Pye had by this time exchanged his hunter for a quieter horse, of which he was most willing to let Miss Lisa have the use whenever she was so disposed, Percy had not much difficulty in carrying out his wishes. A horse for himself was always procurable at Atherstone, and a lady's saddle having also been obtained, and a skirt furnished by Lane to do duty as a habit, Lisa took her first legitimate ride; and although she found a saddle, as she said, the most inconvenient and unnecessary thing imaginable, and declared she would much rather ride without one, as she had always done before, she grew accustomed to it in a day or two; and from having had so much stolen practice, and being naturally of a fearless disposition, she was very soon an accomplished horse-woman. Their rides grew longer and longer, extending for miles away into parts of the country where she had never been before, and which were very wild and beautiful; over lonely heaths, through deep woods and overhanging lanes, and up among the hills, on which she had often looked as the boundary of Atherstone view. She was never tired; only becoming brighter and more animated with delight at every new scene, and each fresh opening landscape; and as she cantered by his side with eyes sparkling, and colour

raised by the exercise—or rode along more leisurely, talking in her gay and unconstrained way, with the openness and confidence of a child, it was no wonder his eye so often lingered on her with admiration; and although his words were few, and his manner singularly quiet and undemonstrative, no one would have been surprised to hear that his love for her was something bordering on idolatry.

'I think these rides are so very, very pleasant!' she exclaimed one day, 'and certainly this is the most delightful time in all my life; I never was a quarter so happy before. Oh! Percy, what a view! Put up your glass and look at it, for it is quite perfect. Do you see the sunlight on that glimpse of the river below, and those deep shadows on the rocks opposite? How lovely it is, and how beautiful the heather looks! What a bright purple it is, and what quantities of it too!'

They had paused under a clump of trees upon the brow of a hill, and were looking down upon one of the lonely but very picturesque valleys which were not uncommon in those parts, but which were quite new to Lisa, and always threw her into ecstasies whenever they happened to come across one in the course of their excursions. It was a long time now before she could take her eyes from the scene before her, and for some minutes she seemed so absorbed in taking in all its beauties, that she grew quite [redacted] and thoughtful, as if more than half oppressed

by the loveliness that lay around. But when they moved on at last, she began again in her usual tone.

'Yes, I like these rides so much; they are one of the greatest pleasures I could have. I am so glad to see all these new and beautiful places; and then, too, I am so fond of a horse; I always was. Percy,' turning to him with a laugh, 'do you remember my last ride in the spring—that day when I was so determined to have it in spite of you? How badly I behaved then! Do you recollect how rude I was to you? I hit you with my whip. I have often thought of it since. I hope I didn't hurt you.'

He smiled a little. 'Your hand is not very heavy, Lisa. If you had been no more hurt than I was, it would have been a good thing for both of us.'

'For me, you mean; but it was only what I deserved,' she said, very decidedly. 'I wonder, do you know, you ever took any more trouble about me afterwards. What a wilful, disagreeable girl you must have thought me! I can't imagine how it was you didn't hate me and give me up as good for nothing.'

'Instead of liking you all the better for it. I am afraid, Lisa, that your wilfulness and your—your what shall I call it——?'

'Bad, spiteful temper?' suggested Lisa, patting her horse's neck.

'Nothing of the sort,' looking scandalised: 'your—well, your dislike of me, for I suppose it all came from

that—I am afraid that was the very thing which first attracted me to you. I don't think I should have cared for you half so much, if you had not been what you were.'

Lisa opened her eyes. 'You liked me for being naughty, then, you mean? for doing what I was told not—for being self-willed, disobedient and unamiable; for being everything, in fact, that was very bad. Oh, Percy!'

'It was not right, perhaps,' with a smile, 'but I am afraid it is the truth. I don't know that I always approved of what you did; but I liked it—liked it, I suppose, as coming from you. And I am afraid it is the case still. You may do what you please, Lisa. You can do nothing I should not like.'

'Nothing!' and Lisa smiled a little. 'But, Percy, that is very wrong of you; you oughtn't to say that. If I don't do right, you ought to tell me of it, and help me to be better. And that is what I want you to do, and what I hope you will; because I have so many faults, and if I haven't some one to remind me of them, I shall never get rid of them all. And if you say you like them—that you would like anything I do, you will never help me at all, I am afraid. Only I don't quite believe that.' She rode on in silence for a short distance, and then she said suddenly, very gravely, though with a sparkle of suppressed merriment in her eyes, 'If I were to tell you by-and-bye I didn't care for you, I suppose you would like that too.'

'Lisa!' His voice was so terribly hoarse and unnatural—so changed in one moment, that she was quite startled; and when she turned to look at him, there was a cloud upon his face such as she had never seen before. For a minute it brought back the impression she had once had when she had known him only from his likeness—the impression that it might be a terrible thing to offend him; and in something like fear she shrank away. He noticed the movement, and it recalled him to himself. He tried to force a smile.

'I did not frighten you, did I, Lisa? I did not intend to do that,' looking at her scared and troubled face with a pang of self-reproach. 'Don't look so miserable, dearest. I meant nothing. But never say such a thing as that again—anything else you like, but not that, if you don't wish to make me wretched. I can't bear to think there might ever be a chance of your changing towards me.'

Lisa drew a long breath of relief, for he was speaking like himself again.

'Why, Percy, you didn't think I meant it! I was only in jest. You can't suppose I said it in earnest.'

'No, dearest, no. But—' he hesitated, and then repeated, 'Don't say it again; Lisa, never say anything of that sort, even if it is only in jest. You don't know what it would be if you trifled with me. Don't do it,

dearest, even if you mean nothing. I could not bear it.'

There was one thing then she could do which he would not like; and if he had not spoken as he did, Lisa might have said something light with reference to his former speech. But she did not do so now; she only said in a low voice:

'I won't do anything you don't wish, Percy—I never will. And you can't really think I should ever trifle with you. It's so impossible, that I am sure you are jesting now.'

He smiled, but he made no other answer, and the subject was dropped, though from some cause or other there was just the slightest shade of constraint between them for the remainder of the way home. Slight as it was, however, it was sufficient to make Lisa uneasy, and when, on reaching the farm, they left her own horse at the stable and she walked back with him to the gate where his was waiting for him, she looked so grave that he noticed it and asked what was the matter with her. Was she very much tired?

'No, not at all.' But a minute after a little hand came stealing into his.

'Percy, I didn't vex you, did I, when I said that silly thing? You are not angry with me, are you?'

[redacted]with you!' and his face brightened in a [redacted]My darling, what could make you think [redacted]g? As if I could ever be angry with you!

No, Lisa, it was not that. I will tell you what it was. For one moment, I thought you were in earnest—at least I thought that such a thing might be, and —— Ah, well, never mind, it is not true; for you are mine, you know—mine always. You have promised me.'

'Yes, and I like to think I have. I wouldn't have my promise back for anything. And you won't remember that any more, will you? You won't think again I meant it? I didn't, Percy, indeed; if I had known you would take it in that way, I would never, never have said it!'

'I know that, dearest. It was only for a minute the thought came, and it was a terrible one. But I am sorry I frightened you so much. Have you forgiven me, Lisa, or are you still afraid of me?'

'Afraid of you! Oh, Percy!'

'Yes, afraid of me. You were before, Lisa. I did not like to see you look as you did then.'

'Because you didn't speak like yourself, you were so strange. But you are not now; you are just what you always are.'

He put his arm round her and gave her a very long kiss, and then he went away without another word. And so the little cloud vanished.

It was the only one, or even semblance of one, during the whole of that very happy visit; the single drawback to which was that it went a great deal too fast, the days hardly seeming to begin before they ended.

Those long morning rides were, perhaps, Lisa's chief delight: but there were other things which were almost as pleasant; and of these not the least were her rambles in the evening time, when Percy was sure to make his appearance again, sometimes alone, but more often with Mary, who liked to come over and see what they were all doing. Of the others she saw but little. Arthur walked in two or three times, and Elinor with him; but they complained of the dust and heat of the road, and did not appear inclined to repeat their visits too frequently; and Isabel was invisible altogether. Invisible also at home, it seemed, if Arthur's account were to be trusted. He declared she was living in retirement, shut up in her own room; from which she only emerged at meal-times, when she was covered with ends of cotton, ravellings of silk and bits of ribbon, and talked of nothing but pincushions and antimacassars. He had been unable for a long time, he said, to discover the cause of these singular proceedings; but at length had found out that she was working for a fancy bazaar which was to be held in the course of the ensuing month, and for which her services had been enlisted. Being so engrossed with this new employment, of course she had no leisure for walking, and therefore her non-appearance at Copelands was no subject for wonder; nor, if the truth must be told, was it very much regretted. It was too great a plea-

[redacted]Lisa to be free even for a few days from the

supervision which she often felt so galling. If left to herself, indeed, she would have been quite happy to forget for that brief space that she had a cousin Isabel at all, and she never once dreamed of lamenting her absence. It was much pleasanter to see only Mary—Mary, who never scolded her, and who was so sympathising; who looked so pleased to see her happy, and who seemed as if she could understand all her feelings without even being told what they were. There was a great deal to talk of when she came, and long rambles about the farm and its neighbourhood with her and Percy; and when Mary was kept at home, he came alone, for he had always some excuse for getting over, and not a day passed without that second visit on his part; a fact which did not long escape the notice of Mrs. Pye, and from which she very soon began to form her own conjectures. 'Of course,' she said, 'it was all very right that Miss Lisa, who was not well, and who had come there for country air, should have those long rides; and a great deal of good they did her, that was quite certain, for she always came back from them with very bright eyes and colour; and it was quite proper, too, that Captain Tennent, who was her cousin and so much older than herself, should go with her at such times; nor was there much either in his walking over again in the evenings with his sister, when she wished to get out there; but when it came to his coming alone, and staying so long too (hadn't he been walking

in the meadow with Miss Lisa till nearly ten o'clock one evening?) why then she began to have her suspicions: and really, if he had not been so old, and if Miss Lisa had not been such a little bit of a thing, she could almost have fancied there was something in it all. As far as that went, however, one did hear now and then of very young girls marrying men ever so much older than themselves; though certainly Captain Tennent was not the sort of man she could imagine any girl taking a fancy to. And Lane, to whom she one day mentioned her conjecture, was so indignant at the bare idea of such a thing, that she could have half supposed after all that she was mistaken, had not many little circumstances kept alive her suspicions. Miss Lisa's sudden blush once, when he happened to come unexpectedly, and she caught sight of him passing the window as they were all sitting at tea; and her evident disappointment another time when it rained, and something was said by one of the younger children about nobody being able to get over from the Priory that evening (though he did come after all); these and a number of other little things were not lost upon Mrs. Pye, and she deduced her own conclusions from them. But as the farmer only laughed, and Lane was evidently injured when anything of the sort was said, she generally kept her thoughts to herself, and made her own observations without confiding them to anyone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FIRST LINK IN A LONG CHAIN.

LISA came back from that visit to Copelands looking as different as possible from what she had done two weeks before; and Dr. Tennent, to whom she rushed for a kiss directly she entered the drawing-room, declared himself highly pleased with the result of his prescription; adding, with a twinkle in his eye, that he thought he should advise Mrs. Pye to set up a regular boarding-house for invalids; he should be always ready to recommend her; and if she could turn out many such roses as those Lisa had brought back with her, he had no doubt she would soon make her fortune.

'Yes, providing the invalids, when they go there, have no more the matter with them than her late one had,' remarked Mrs. Tennent, drily. 'Stand out of the light, child. Don't you see I am working?'

'Providing, too, they have Percy to look after them,' put in Arthur from an easy chair in which he had established himself, and where he was very busy pulling Prince's ears. 'If my uncle gave the prescription, Percy seems to have taken on himself to see

that it was duly followed. I wonder how often he h been out there lately. Pretty nearly every day, suspect, if the truth were known, Miss Lisa? Did I think your morals wanted improving, and he was tl best person to do it; or what was it gave you so muc of his company?'

It was a random speech, meaning no more than good many others, to which, as coming from hin nobody ever thought of attaching any importance; an he was rather surprised now at the effect it produce on more than one person in the room. Mrs. Tenner coughed, the doctor fidgeted, and Lisa herself gre very crimson, and saying something about taking o her bonnet, vanished in a great hurry. Percy, too, wh had come in with her, was evidently embarrassed; hi attempts to appear unconscious over a newspaper whic he had taken up, being a signal failure; and Arthu glanced at them all in succession in no little astonish ment.

'What's the matter?' he said, at last. 'Everybod looks very queer. Is there anything in the wind?'

There was no answer at first. Dr. Tennent looked a his wife, who sat immovable, and then at his son.

'Well, yes; I believe there is. And I don't know tha it need be a secret any longer; eh, my dear? eh, Percy You don't wish it not to be known now, do you?'

'Cert[illegible]ot, sir—the sooner it is known the better in [illegible]. It was not my wish it was kep

secret at all; and I always understood that directly this Copelands visit was over, it was to be made public. Mrs. Tennent told me it should, and I suppose she sees no reason now to retract her promise.'

Mrs. Tennent jerked her needle out sharply, snapping her thread as she did so.

'You know what I think about it, Percy. It has not my sanction; I consider it an exceedingly foolish business!'

There was no reply to this; perhaps Percy thought he was old enough to judge for himself whether he were acting foolishly or not, for something like a smile passed over his face for a moment, and then he said very quietly, but with a good deal of proud happiness in his tone, 'Lisa and I are engaged.'

If a thunderbolt had fallen at Arthur's feet, he could hardly have looked more petrified than he did at this announcement; and as for Isabel and Elinor, who were sitting by, they were even more taken by surprise than he was. For some minutes not a word was said by one of them, and if Percy had expected congratulations, he must for the time have been wofully disappointed by that blank silence. By degrees, however, Arthur seemed to be coming to himself again; though even then, after knitting his brows and staring straight before him a few moments longer, as if to make quite sure he had collected his scattered senses, he still appeared rather bewildered.

'Well,' he said, slowly, 'I don't understand it, and that's the truth. I shall by-and-bye perhaps, but at present—engaged, did you say? Lisa, that little chit! And to you! Why, she always told me—at least I'm sure I thought she had a particular objection to—I mean—' and then finding he was blundering, 'I beg your pardon, but really it's so very odd. Of course it's true, as you say it; only I can't take it in yet. I had an idea, you see,—but I suppose I was mistaken.'

'I suppose you were,' rather stiffly.

'Now, old fellow, don't be offended;' and Arthur jumped up from his chair. 'You don't think I'm not glad? I am as glad as can be, and wish you joy with all my heart,' wringing his cousin's hand as he spoke. 'But such a thing requires time to digest, and I've by no means even swallowed it yet. I don't think I was ever more surprised in my life, for you must allow it is extraordinary, to say the least of it. Lisa is such a mite to begin with—why, she has only just been put into long frocks — woman's dresses, I mean; and she's not out of the nursery yet. She plays with Conny's dolls, and makes herself very happy over a cart and horse with George; and really the idea of her coming out in such a new line is startling. It passes my comprehension, and that's the simple fact.'

'You are quite right, Arthur,' Mrs. Tennent said. 'The whole thing is very foolish and absurd; and so

I have said all along. I am glad you see it in that light.'

'In what light? It's odd, certainly, but it's very jolly. You don't mean, ma'am, you don't like it? that you don't think little Scaramouch has shown her sense in making such a choice? I for one shall most decidedly congratulate her upon possessing such a large amount of that said article, for that is to me the most astonishing part of the business. Excuse my saying it, Percy, but—you are not exactly the sort of fellow I should have thought she would take a fancy to. You understand, don't you?'

'Quite,' and Percy smiled a little, not in the least offended at this speech. He was as well aware as any one could be of his own deficiencies—perhaps even more so; and there might be some pride in the thought that, in spite of them all, he had yet been able to win the heart of his beautiful little cousin. Most probably, too, he was prepared for the surprise which was sure to be expressed by everyone when Lisa's choice came to be known; but although not likely to be hurt or annoyed by this, there was a disappointment in store for him which he had not expected. Next to Mary, he had always looked to Isabel for sympathy in everything, and he never doubted now that what was such a great happiness to him would give her pleasure also; that when she knew it, she would be the very first to express her delight and wish him joy. It was to her

he had turned when speaking of his engagement, and, while Arthur ran on afterwards, it was at her he was looking all the time, hoping for a word or look in return to tell him how much she entered into his feelings.

But he waited in vain. When her first astonishment was over, she took up her work again, and neither spoke nor raised her eyes; and although Arthur, having now worked off his surprise, rattled on into all 'the jolliness of the affair,' and, in spite of very ominous coughs and other signs from head-quarters, persisted in saying over and over again how very glad he was, and declaring that Percy was the luckiest fellow in existence; and although even Elinor, with a timid glance at her mother, whispered that 'she was so pleased—so very much pleased'—not a word came from Isabel. She kept her head down, and her fingers were so busy with the needle she was drawing in and out, that she seemed to have no thoughts for anything else. Her brother watched her for a few minutes, and then, while the others were still talking, he crossed the room, and sat down by her side.

'And so you are not going to give me a word, Isabel?' he said, half lightly, half reproachfully. 'You won't even tell me you are glad that Lisa and I are so happy? You are so busy with your work, that you cannot spare time to give a thought to us. And yet I want to hear something from you more than any one.'

She did look up then, but it was not with the smile he had hoped to see.

'I don't know exactly what you want to hear, Percy; but I am afraid if I were to say what I think, you would not like it; so perhaps I had better say nothing at all. I don't wish to vex you, but—'

'But what?' and he looked hurt. 'You think, I suppose, I am too old for her, and shall not make her happy—that she might have done better.'

'She! no indeed! I think you might have done better. Oh, Percy, she is not the wife for you—indeed she is not. You don't know what you are doing.' And Isabel's hand was laid imploringly on his arm. 'She is so different from anyone you ought to marry; so different from anyone I ever hoped you would! You cannot know her, I am sure, or you would not think of her; you will never be happy.'

'Nonsense, Isabel,' half angrily: 'surely I must be the best judge of the sort of wife I want, and who is most likely to make me happy; you can't expect me to marry to please you, or even to consult your taste in my choice. The idea is too absurd! I did hope, though,' and he came back to his usual tone, but with even more than his usual affection in it, 'I did hope you would care for anyone I chose; that even if she were a stranger, you would love her for my sake. But Lisa! Lisa, whom you have known so long, who must be like a sister to you already, and who is so winning and lovable in herself! What on earth makes you think I shall not be happy with her?'

'Everything,' Isabel exclaimed, passionately. 'She is not in the least suited for you; and so you would feel if you knew her as I do. But,' changing her voice as she saw his impatient look, 'what is the use of saying anything about it? You have made up your mind, I suppose; and as you said just now, you are not marrying to please me. I can't change your opinion, of course, and therefore we had better leave things as they are; there is no good in talking of what will only vex us both.'

Percy bit his lip. 'And that is all you have to say to me, then? These are all the good wishes you have to give us? They are not exactly what I should have expected,' he added, rather bitterly.

'I was not speaking of wishes,' Isabel said, hastily, and with a feeling of something like compunction for what seemed unkindness on her part. 'I was not speaking of wishes at all; you can't misunderstand me in that way, Percy, for, as far as they go, you know well enough that nobody can wish more for you than I do; no one can care more to see you happy, or hope more that you will be; and Lisa too——'

'Well, and that is all I want,' he interrupted. 'But why didn't you say so before? Why did you look so grave, as if it was nothing to you whether we were happy or not?'

[redacted]se—' she hesitated. 'Hoping is not expecting, [redacted]d—I can't say I am glad for what I am [redacted]n't bring you happiness.'

He looked annoyed. 'And you won't let me be the judge whether it is likely to do so?' he said, impatiently.

She was silent, and took up her work again.

'What makes you think it will not? What has poor Lisa done to make you think so hardly of her? She is the brightest, sweetest tempered, and most loving little creature in the world. She would make anyone she lived with happy. Why should you speak of her in that cold, depreciating way?'

'I did not mean it to be depreciating. I like Lisa very much, and I believe there is a great deal that is good in her; but at the same time I have known her much longer than you have, and I know she has a great many faults.'

Percy's head went up in the way in which he often showed displeasure.

'She has, has she? I am glad to hear it. I have a particular objection to people who are considered perfect; they are so utterly beyond the reach of sympathy themselves, and have so little of it to give to those unfortunate beings who don't come up to them. But pray, what are these dreadful faults which make you think so badly of poor Lisa? She has too much spirit for you, I suppose? You would like her to be tame and quiet—like any other girl, in fact—and with nothing of all that about her which makes her so original and so charming.'

Isabel looked grave. 'I certainly should like her spirit shown in a different way,' she said; 'I don't think it speaks well for the temper or disposition of anyone to be always in opposition to those who have the direction of them. But that was not what I was thinking of when I spoke. You know what I once said of her—you know what everyone says, and how very like——'

'Take care, Isabel,' and his face grew dark. 'Take care what you are saying, if you please. Remember what Lisa is to me now. She is my promised wife.'

'I know that—oh, Percy, how could you think of her? Yes, you must be angry with me if you like. I can't help it. I must say what I think. She is like her mother; she is light and frivolous; it is *that* makes me afraid for her, and afraid for you; afraid she will never make you happy.'

'Oh!' and whether he looked most annoyed or most amused was difficult to say. 'And so that is the grand crime, is it? She is a child—and a very gay and simple one, who finds amusement in everything, and picks up pleasures where no one else would look for them; and because she has not learned to see life yet in a sober, matter-of-fact view, she is set down as frivolous; and by you of all people! Isabel, I thought you had more penetration, and,' he added pointedly, [redacted] he was really piqued, 'more kindness than to [redacted]her so harshly.'

Isabel's face flushed. 'I am sorry you think me unkind. If I am, though,' she added, after a moment's pause, 'it is because I think so much of you, Percy; because I should have liked—well, never mind now—it is too late to tell you what I think about a thing that is settled, and which you, certainly, don't wish undone. Better leave things as they are and make the best of them; there is no reason we should quarrel because we don't think alike.'

All very different from what he had hoped to hear from his favourite sister, who, in general, was so full of sympathy and interest in all that concerned him; and chilled, hurt, and disappointed, Percy walked away. Nor was Isabel herself much more comfortable. She felt she had said and done the wrong thing; that whatever Lisa's faults and shortcomings were, that was not the time to have brought them forth and canvassed them; that it would have been far better and kinder to meet her brother's first overflowing of happiness in the spirit which had brought him to her, and to look less to what was wanting in her cousin than to the many winning and attractive qualities which had won his love. Such a course would have been far more likely to strengthen the bond between them than the one she had pursued, and so she felt directly he was gone; but although aware of this, and half inclined to follow him and say something to efface the impression her words had left, she did not follow the impulse which would

have led her to do so. Some new and strangely unpleasant feeling had taken possession of her; a feeling so unpleasant that she did not care to analyse it, and she would have found it extremely disagreeable to confess, even to herself, that there was something very like jealousy at the bottom of it.

But so it was. It is no easy matter to give up a place where we have been first and to which we think we have a right; and Isabel had so long been in the habit of regarding her brother as belonging more particularly, and in some things almost exclusively, to herself, that it was hard to realise the fact that she must henceforth resign him as her own peculiar property, and be content to stand only second in his affections. Still more difficult was it to have kind and loving feelings towards one who had taken her place, though this she would have found a comparatively easy task had it been a stranger who had dispossessed her of it. But that Lisa, so much younger, so far inferior to herself, and upon whom she had always looked down—that she was to be the person to whom she was to yield what all her life she had most prized, made the trial harder. It was no wonder, perhaps, that the deficiencies she had so often seen and lamented in her cousin should have been the first thought to present itself to her mind when she heard of her brother's engagement; but she little knew what she was doing when allowing her feelings of jealous surprise and annoyance to

interfere with the sympathy for which he looked, and lead her to depreciate her rival. For Percy was not one to hear, with indifference, those whom he loved spoken of slightingly; or to brook toleration only, where he himself idolised. She had raised a barrier between them such as once she never could have dreamed of; and although it was slight at first, and therefore she thought but little of what a few words on her part might so easily break down, yet from some cause or other those words were not spoken, and opportunities once lost, who can tell when they may return?

Lisa came back to the drawing-room quite unaware of the revelation that had taken place during her absence, and her confusion upon finding her engagement was no longer a secret, was so great that she was not likely to remark the manner of those about her, or to notice the silence of one or two among the many voices surrounding her. All she thought of, or cared for, was to escape observation as much as possible; and looking very shy, very frightened, and very crimson, without even daring to steal a glance at Percy as she passed him, she ensconced herself behind one of the farthest tables by Mary's side, and did her best to keep out of sight. But Arthur was not disposed to let her off so easily. He followed her with his raillery.

'I say, Lisa,' sitting down opposite to her, 'what a

lucky thing for you that you didn't take my wager
Christmas! When did you begin to change your min
or was it only fibbing on your part, and you rea
admired him all along? That was it, I believe. Y
heart was won by medals, clasps, and 'glory;' b
knowing that such feelings of intense admiration w
quite inadmissible, you chose to conceal them by p
petrating an amount of story-telling for which I sho
never have given you credit. 'Pon my word, I
ashamed of you! I'd no idea you were such
hypocrite!'

'Oh, Arthur, how you tease!' Lisa exclaimed in gr
distress.

'And so you have set up for a woman,' he went
enjoying her confusion. 'Well, it's strange, certain
considering the aversion you always had to such a p
ceeding. And pray what do you mean to do when y
are married? You will have to give up runni
and jumping, and all such amusements, you kn
—they won't be proper. You will have to be
young lady, and sit indoors all day, receiving visit
and playing propriety. You won't like it at all, Li
I can tell you; if you take my advice, you'll thi
twice before you plunge into the matrimonial sta
And do you mean to live in barracks, or what are y
going to do? Imagine the horrors of being shut up
two or three rooms; you, who have run wild all yo

life! And you will be a close prisoner there, you may be quite sure, for Le Balafré—' he shrugged his shoulders expressively—'he is awfully particular, and won't even let you look out of window without his express permission.'

'Won't he? Then I shan't do it,' Lisa said, very simply; and Arthur laughed.

'Taming down already, are you? I thought you were going to say, "Then I shall do it." Well, I hope you will ask me to pay you a visit sometimes if you stay in England. I shall like to see how you get on. I shall expect some fun; and if somebody is to be trusted,' looking at Mrs. Tennent, 'I shall have it. She don't approve of the thing, Lisa, as I suppose you know. Have you heard her mind yet upon the subject?'

Lisa said 'No;' and she looked so frightened at the prospect of what she might have to hear from her aunt, and her distress altogether was so evident, that Arthur at last took compassion on her blushes and confusion, and after a little more teasing left her to herself. All the rest of the evening she sat beside Mary, very quiet and very silent; too much intent upon keeping out of reach of observation herself, to think of noticing others; and happily unconscious, therefore, that it was not by her aunt alone that Percy's choice was disapproved. It was a fact, however, of which she could not long

remain ignorant; and unpleasant as such a disco
must at any time have been, it was made under
cumstances which brought her so much unhappi
that poor Lisa found it one of the hardest trial
had ever had to bear.

CHAPTER XXV.

A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST.

THE following day happened to bring a large party of relations into Atherstone; and as was usually the case on such occasions, they made their appearance at the Priory at an early hour. Lisa, who had no particular fancy to meet them sooner than necessary, and who guessed rightly that herself and her own prospects were the subjects of discussion in the drawing-room, kept out of the way all the morning, and when her work with Mary was ended, spent the half-hour before luncheon with Percy in the green-walk. She was returning to the house with him at one o'clock, when seeing the library window standing open as they passed, she turned in there with some flowers she had been gathering, and which she wanted to place in water. She imagined that the room was empty, as was generally the case at that hour, but, as she was stopping for a moment while Percy stooped to disentangle her dress from the straggling branch of a rose-tree in which it had caught, she heard voices within, and her own name mentioned. It was Isabel speaking.

'I wouldn't mind,' she was saying, 'if she were at all likely to make him happy; it would be nothing then. But she never will. There is no depth, no earnestness of character about her. She is just a pretty child, and no more; very taking in manner when she pleases, but as light and frivolous as possible, and with no tastes to make her a companion to him. And then her mother! But you know all about that, Rose. And Lisa is just like her.'

'Yes, so mamma says. I don't remember Mrs. Kennedy myself, but mamma says Lisa always reminds her of her; that she has all her beauty over again, and is just like her in her ways. But you surely don't think Lisa would do anything so bad as that! How shocking it was! Fancy going off and leaving her husband and child in that way—somebody told me Mr. Kennedy broke his heart about it; he had been so proud of her. But I never heard what became of her. I don't think any one knew exactly. The last time she was seen, I believe, was at a *rouge-et-noir* table at Homburg, or some such place. It was a miserable affair altogether.'

What more might have been said it would be hard to tell, but the dress was disentangled by this time, and Lisa stood within the window, to the surprise and no little consternation of the two speakers. Her face was very white, but upon each cheek there burned a bright red spot. For a moment she looked first at

one, and then at the other, without a word, while Isabel and Rose both gazed at her in silent dismay. Rose was the first to recover herself, and, making an attempt to appear unconcerned, she held out her hand.

'Well, Lisa, how do you do? I was wondering where you were, and whether you meant to show yourself at all; you have kept out of the way so cleverly all the morning. Where have you been? Ah, I see; yes, of course,' with a smile, as she caught sight of Percy behind her. And then becoming alarmed again at the fixed unnatural look of the large eyes that gazed down upon her—'But how very strange you look! is anything the matter?'

'Yes,' in a choked voice. 'Rose, what was that you were saying just now about—about my mother?' She shivered from head to foot as she said the word. 'Tell me—tell me again—I want to know what it was.' She spoke hoarsely and passionately.

Rose gazed at her in a frightened kind of way. 'Bless me, child, don't look like that. I didn't say it to you; it wasn't meant for you to hear; and,' gaining a little courage and trying once more to turn it off, 'you shouldn't have been listening. You know the proverb, don't you, "Listeners——"'

'I wasn't listening. I couldn't help hearing. Rose, tell it me again; no one ever said so before.'

Rose's glance at Isabel was one of dismay. 'Do you

mean she never knew it? But how could I know she was there?' And once more she turned to Lisa, whose white face looked full of despair—'Lisa, I told you it wasn't meant for you to hear. What is the use of asking questions when I can't answer them?'

'Because you know it's not true,' very fiercely and passionately. 'How dare you say such things of *her*; things that you know are not true—which never could be true? You may say what you like of me—that I am light, frivolous, anything else you please,' with a look at Isabel. 'I am not good, I know; I am bad, very bad, in a great many ways, and you may tell me so; but you shall say nothing against *her*—never, no, never. I won't hear it; I won't believe it, for it's not true—not one word of it. How dare you say it?' she repeated, still more passionately. 'Percy, you heard it—you heard what she said; you will tell her it's all wrong, won't you? Tell her it's false—all of it—that it never, never could be true.'

But the sad, silent look with which Percy met her beseeching one, told her it *was* true; and, flinging down her flowers, she stood for a moment covering her face with her hands, and then, before he could stop her, she rushed from the room.

'And that was why you would never tell me anything about her; why you always put me off when I asked you where she was? Oh, Mary, it's very, very

hard;' and poor Lisa sobbed bitterly as she knelt by her cousin's side, where, according to her usual custom in her troubles, she had taken refuge. 'I never thought such a thing as that. How could I? I have wondered all these years where she was, but I never guessed that. And somehow I always hoped she would come back—that I should see her again; but now—' a fresh burst of tears choked her utterance.

'Dearest Lisa, how I wish you had never heard it!' And Mary stroked her hair caressingly; her own tears falling fast.

'And now I can never hope to see her again. I couldn't, you know—it would be so dreadful. Mary, I hope it isn't wrong, but do you know I would rather have heard she was dead—yes, far rather—it would not have been so bad as this. I should not have minded it half so much. But not to know where she is, or anything about her except that—that she is—Oh, Mary, do you know? Have you ever heard any more than what Rose said just now?'

'Yes, dear, I have,' in a very low voice.

'You have?' and she looked up with a wild, startled glance, but something in her cousin's face seemed to tell her what she was to hear, and she laid her head down again with a shudder. 'Mary, is she dead?'

'Yes—dear Lisa, my child, you must not cry like that,' as the bitter sobs came again. 'You have nothing to be sorry for now for her. It was far better and

happier for her to die as she did; you won't think it so bad when you know everything. I can show you a letter we had about her; you won't feel so unhappy then, Lisa.'

'A letter?'

'Yes, a letter papa had last winter from Mr. Hirst, when he was in Germany. He was at Wiesbaden, and he knew the chaplain there, who had seen her very often. Papa will let you have the letter, and you will know then how much better it is than we could ever have hoped; you will feel there is no need to be unhappy about her any longer.'

Lisa gave a long, long sigh. 'When was it, Mary? When did she die?' she said at last in a broken voice.

'Last year, dear; somewhere about this time I think it must have been.'

'Last year—last August! That was—let me see; yes, that was when we were all staying at Copelands, and Arthur was with us. We were very happy then. I didn't think, Mary—I couldn't tell,' and her lip quivered, 'I couldn't tell that she was dying—lonely and miserable.'

'Not miserable, dearest,' said Mary, trying to still the burst of anguish that had followed these words. 'She was not miserable. You won't think so when you have seen that letter.'

'And afterwards in the winter when you heard of it, [illegible] all this time too—I have been very happy—I knew

nothing about it. I never thought of what had happened —that she was gone—that she had died in that way. Oh, why wasn't I told? Why did you all let me go on caring nothing for her; never thinking that I shouldn't see her again? It was cruel—cruel of aunt Helen not to tell me—for it was her doing, I am sure. She said I was not to know it. Oh, it was cruel—cruel!'

'Hush! Lisa dear: don't cry in that way—it was not cruel, indeed; at least, it was not meant to be. You knew nothing of her history, then, you know; it was always thought better you should not. And why should you have been told what it would only have distressed you to hear, when we could give you no explanations with it? Indeed, dear, it was done for the best; and you must remember I should not have told you even now if you had not unfortunately learned what you were never meant to know, and I thought then it would make you happier to hear that the worst was over; that as far now as she is concerned, there is no more cause for grief.'

'Yes, yes—oh yes—I am glad for that, Mary—I am, indeed. I am glad you have told me; glad I can know it is not so bad as I thought at first. But—' and she sobbed convulsively—'I don't like to think of all this past year, and my having been so happy, when—when she was gone for ever, and I could have no more hope of seeing her again. For somehow, I

always did hope I should. I don't know why. She was so fond of me; that was the reason, I suppose. I was a little child then, you know—only a little child—but I remember how she used to kiss and play with me. I remember, too, the last time I ever saw her. It was one night, and I had been asleep: and I woke up and saw her standing by me; she was going to a ball, I think, for she was dressed in white, and she had roses in her hair; but she was crying, oh, so sadly! and she must have been kissing me, for my face was quite wet with her tears. And then she went away, and I never saw her again. They told me the next day she was gone—that she would never come back. But I always hoped she would; and now—now I can hope no more!'

There was a long silence, broken only by her passionate weeping, for Mary saw that for the time it was useless to try and comfort her; it was better to let her grief have way.

'I wonder whether she ever thought of me,' she said at last; 'whether she ever spoke of me or wanted to see me again. Do you think she did, Mary? Or do you think she had quite forgotten me?'

'Forgotten you? oh, no! She must have thought of you very often, and spoken of you too. But you shall see Mr. Hirst's letter, dear, that will tell you everything; you will see then you were not forgotten.'

And there was another silence, till the opening of

the door, roused Lisa from her crouching posture by her cousin's side, and made her look round hastily. It was Percy who was standing there, and at sight of him she started up. For a moment she looked as if she longed to throw herself into his arms, for the comfort he could give her; but the next, some new and painful thought seemed to strike her, for the colour rushed to her face, and as he came across the room she drew back.

'No, Percy,' she said, sorrowfully, 'you must leave me alone now, please. You must give me up. You heard what they said—what they said of me and of *her*. You can't love me any longer now; you must have nothing more to do with me.' But, in spite of the half resistance she made, he put his arm round her, and drew her to a sofa near.

'Why, Lisa, why am I not to love you now? Because you are unhappy?' a little reproachfully. 'I should have thought that was a reason for loving you more, not for giving you up.'

'Yes, it is. You heard what they said. I am not worth anything now; you can only be ashamed of me, and you must let me take back my promise. I didn't know this when I made it, or—'

'But I did. Lisa, dearest, don't talk in that way. What difference can such a thing make to me? why is it to come between us? I have known it all along; and if I had not—if I had only heard it to-day for the first

time, as you have done, it could not change you, or my feelings towards you. Nothing that anyone else can do, even though she be your own mother, can ever make me think anything of you but what is pure and good.'

'Ah, but other people may; they know whose child I am, and you may some day be ashamed of me. You heard what Isabel said of me—oh, how could she! I don't think I'm so bad as that. I never knew I was. But if she really thinks so, other people may think the same, and perhaps may say it. Perhaps, too, they may say worse things; and if they do—' She was crying so bitterly that she could not go on.

Percy's brow had darkened visibly at the mention of Isabel's name, and the arm that was round Lisa tightened its hold and drew her still closer to him. 'And if they do, my darling, all the more reason you should have some one to take care of you and protect you; though I should like to know who will dare to say a word against my wife. Listen to me, my own dear little Lisa, and don't cry any more for such thoughts as those. You are mine, and nothing can ever separate us. Let people say what they like, it can make no difference to me. You have done no wrong—nothing to be ashamed of; and you are not answerable for what others do, let those others be who they may. And if you are unhappy, who has so good a right to comfort you as I have? You must never tell me I am to give you up; I could not do it.'

And though Lisa's tears still fell fast, they had lost all their bitterness now. Shocked she was, and miserable, from the blow that had come so unexpectedly, but she could not feel utterly lonely and forsaken; and though knowing herself an orphan now, not in name only, but in sad reality, she felt that she was not friendless and uncared for; and she clung all the more closely to one who was to supply the place of so many to her, and who came between her and the dreary sense of desolation that at first had pressed so heavily upon her.

Nothing Percy could do or say, however, could ever remove the impression made by that revelation of her mother's history, or divest her of the feeling of shame which any thought of it always brought back —a feeling which was all the stronger and deeper, because it was unconfessed. After that first burst of grief was over, she never again recurred to the subject, and no one ever heard her mention her mother's name. She read the letter her uncle gave her with many tears; but she said nothing at the time, and never spoke of it again; though none the less did she dwell upon it in secret, and very dark, for the time, was the shadow that glimpse of the past had cast upon her path.

It was well for her that she was not of a nature to cherish anything like unkind or angry feelings; and therefore she had no bitter thoughts towards those who,

although unintentionally, had so cruelly wounded her. Rose Dacre, indeed, expressed the greatest sorrow for the pain she had caused; averring, as was truly the case, that both she and Isabel had believed they were alone, or they never would have spoken so unreservedly; and Lisa would have been very unlike her usual self, had she not readily accepted the excuse, and apologised on her part for the hasty words uttered in her passion. Even towards her cousin, too, who said nothing, she could not feel unkindly. Isabel was so far above her in every way, that in her cooler moments she never dreamed of questioning the justice of her opinions; and her great sorrow, when she came to reflect on what had passed, was in the conviction that there must surely be some truth in her words. It added to the depression which had come upon her; and if Isabel could have guessed anything of her thoughts, perhaps she might have been inclined to make advances, which would have led to a change of feeling between them, and have effaced the impression left by her harsh judgment. A very few words would have done this, for Lisa was in no mood then to resent the wrong that had been done her, and would have been ready enough, and only too grateful, to accept any friendly overtures from one to whom she looked up with so much reverence.

But these overtures were never made; for Isabel said [redacted] that after all she had only said what she [redacted] be true, and she believed it still. She could

not, therefore, retract her words; and as she thought no better of Lisa than she did before, why should she try to make her fancy that she did, only because her cousin had happened to learn something which it was never intended she should hear? She should be a hypocrite to pretend what she did not feel; and to these thoughts there was added another, which, had she been disposed to acknowledge it, she would most probably have discovered to be the real cause of her silence. It was the same which had crossed her mind when she first heard of the new relationship in which her cousin was likely to stand to her—the thought that she was taking her place with one who was very dear to her; and while her jealous love for her brother tended to open her eyes, more than ever, to much that was faulty in poor Lisa, it did not help her, for his sake, to bear with her, and endeavour to bring out the nobler and better qualities of her warm and impulsive nature. She saw in her now, not the little wayward cousin, whom for years she had been in the habit of checking and reproving, and treating as a wilful and capricious child, but a rival who had supplanted her in her brother's affections, and changed his warmest feelings towards her. For that there was a change in him she saw plainly enough; and in spite of one or two inward suspicions which told her she was wronging Lisa, it was a change she chose to set down to her account. She did not listen to the voice that whispered it came from herself alone; that

it was her own jealousy which stood between her and him; that his love for another was of a different kind, and need not necessarily diminish that which he felt for her. Nor did she see that it was not too late, even then, to meet him with sympathy in his new ties; and that by so doing, she would be far more likely to retain and strengthen his love for herself, and to conduce also to her own happiness and comfort, than by pursuing her present course. She did not see and feel all this now; nor did she understand that there might come a time when she would bitterly regret her coldness, and vainly wish she could recall the past.

It was some days before Lisa at all got over the shock she had received; and during that time, she kept almost entirely in her own or Mary's room. She really was not well; and although this seclusion was an indulgence which would not in general have been granted her, it did not require much of Percy's persuasion on this occasion to induce Mrs. Tennent to let her do as she liked. For once her aunt seemed to enter into her feelings, and to be sorry for her; and when she saw her come down again at last, and, although going about as usual, yet looking pale and sad, and far more silent than was her wont, her manner towards her for a day or two was wonderfully softened and forbearing. It was not a change likely to last, but it was one for which, though only temporary, poor Lisa in her present frame of mind was deeply thankful.

It was on the evening of that second day, when she and Percy were sitting alone together in the garden, that he for the first time spoke to her of what, although he had mentioned it to his father, he had never yet told her; and that was, his wish that their marriage should not be delayed very long; his leave would be up in November, and—it would make him so very happy if, when he went away, he could take her with him. Did she think she could consent to such a thing? It was a great deal to ask, he knew; for he was afraid she had not yet thought much about it, and the time was rather short. She should not give him an answer then, however; she should wait a little to consider of it, and tell him by-and-bye whether she could make up her mind to leave the Priory so soon, and try life in a new home with him.

And as he said this, Percy looked at her anxiously; trying to get a glimpse of her face; hoping, no doubt, although he had told her he did not want a reply just then, he should see there some promise of a favourable one. But it was getting dark, and her head was turned away. He could make out nothing; and she was silent so long, that he began to fear she did not like what he had said—that he had displeased her.

It was not displeasure, however, that kept her silent; it was simple surprise. Somehow, she had never before thought about such a thing. Although quite aware that he would be going before very long, it had

never occurred to her that he would ask her to g
with him. She had supposed they would be marrie
some time—in a few years, perhaps, when she wa
more of a woman—her ideas upon the subject ha
not been very definite; indeed, she had thought ver
little about it. She had been content to live on i
the present; and as long as he was with her, she ha
not even cared to conjecture what she should do whe
he was gone: it would be very wretched without him, sh
knew; but the time was not come yet, and until it wa
she would not think of it. But this proposition of his
it was so very unexpected and so startling, that she
really did not know what to make of it; and when
after some minutes still no reply came, Percy began
by degrees to be confirmed in his opinion of having
displeased her.

'Won't you speak to me, Lisa, dearest? You don't
like what I said, perhaps? You think it is asking too
much?'

'No,' she said, still keeping her head turned away.
'It's not that—but—Percy, I never thought about it
before; and I am such a little thing, you know,' she
hesitated. 'I am not old enough to—to——'

'Well, dearest, you shall do as you like,' he said,
finding she did not go on; though his tone betrayed
something of his intense disappointment. 'If you
would rather not, of course I will not ask it of you.
It is unreasonable of me, I dare say, to wish it; but I

forget sometimes how much older I am than yourself, and how very different things must look to you from what they do to me. You shall do as you please, therefore. I won't urge anything upon you that you don't like; though I would have done my best, Lisa, to make you happy; you should have had no cause, if I could help it, to regret anything you gave up for me.' And something in his tone made Lisa feel conscience-stricken. She thought she had been unkind.

'That wasn't what I meant, Percy. I would give up anything and everything for you in a moment; you know I would: though what you fancy I am to give up now, I can't think; for I would rather be with you than anywhere else; and I should never be happy when you were away. But—' she hesitated again, and then, after some consideration, came what was always her objection to any proposition: 'Aunt Helen wouldn't like it—she would never think of such a thing for one minute—and even if she did, which is quite impossible, I don't see how it could be, because I know nothing about anything. I should make *such* mistakes; you wouldn't like it at all, Percy. I shouldn't know what to do, and I shouldn't make you happy. I have never done anything for myself before, you know; and I am so little! It would never do—don't you see?' stopping rather abruptly.

'Yes, I see, dearest. Is that all?'

'I should make a mess of everything;' and Lisa

pulled some flowers to pieces and spoke very energetically. 'Besides,' coming back to her last starting-point, 'aunt Helen would say "no," I am quite sure.'

'I think not. If those really are all your objections, Lisa, I don't see why we should not settle it. My father would like it to be soon, I know; and Mrs. Tennent has given her consent—in one way at least—' he paused, smiling a little; but Lisa understood what he meant, and she looked round in the utmost astonishment.

'Aunt Helen!'

'Yes. At any rate, she will not say "no;" so that it depends upon yourself, dear Lisa. I would not let anyone else speak to you about it, because I wished to find out exactly what you would like. But if you only object because you think you are too young—that you cannot do things and won't please me,—why, I am sure that is a mistake. You don't think I am so very hard to please, do you? And as for not knowing what to do, you can soon learn; and you may make as many mistakes as you like, there will be nobody to find fault with you. And, Lisa, I am very tired of my lonely life. I used to find it dull enough before; and now I have known you, it will be worse than ever if I have to go and leave you behind me. If you only knew how I hate the thought of my solitary rooms, wherever they may be! Don't you think you could make up your mind to come and cheer them for me? They would

look so bright if I had you in them! You don't know how happy it would make me if you would say you won't let me go alone.'

'No more I will, Percy. I will do anything you like,' she said, in a low voice.

'Thank you, my darling,' and the tone said even more than the words. 'When shall it be, then, Lisa?' he went on after a long pause. 'Shall we say the beginning of October? We shall like to go somewhere before I am obliged to join again, and that will give us time.'

'Yes, so it will,' and she went on thoughtfully pulling her flower to pieces; but after considering them for some little time she added, slowly, 'Percy, I only want to please you—about the time, I mean; but there is one thing I should like, if you don't mind.'

'What is it, dearest?' he asked, eagerly.

'Why, will you let us be married very quietly? People make a fuss sometimes at weddings. I have seen them now and then at the church here, and I shouldn't like to be married in that way. I shouldn't have liked it at any time; and now,' her voice faltered, 'I couldn't bear it now. Let it be very quiet, please.'

A request to which Percy was only too happy to accede. He disliked 'fuss' at any time quite as much as she did, and under present circumstances, more especially, could fully enter into her feelings for wishing to avoid it. It was settled, therefore, that everything

should be as quiet as possible; and after some consultation with the heads of the family, the wedding day was finally fixed for the 16th of October.

'Very short notice,' remarked Arthur, when this announcement was made. 'But perhaps that is all the better. It will be an intense relief to my mind, certainly, when it's over; for at present Percy is simply unbearable. Whether he is afraid that Lisa will abscond before the day comes, or what it is, I don't know; but if any unfortunate individual of the nobler sex speaks to her, or even presumes to look at her, he is ready to knock us all down. Why, bless me, I've only spoken six civil sentences to her since yesterday morning, and each time I was obliged to make quite sure he was out of the room. And then he's always poking about to find out her whereabouts and what she is doing; and as he can't see six inches before him, this perpetual fidgeting process is an aggravation to everybody in his neighbourhood. She ought to be tied down to a chair in the middle of the room; and then he'd know where to look for her when he comes in, and not disturb other people while carrying on his researches. Well, he'll have enough of her soon; for better, for worse, eh Lisa? And in the meantime we must feel thankful that the present state of things is [illegible]o last seven weeks, instead of seven months or [illegible]ears. I think, though, you needn't have objected [illegible] things handsomely when you were about it.

Very likely you'll never have another chance of being married, and yet you're making nothing of it now. Fancy cutting us out of all our fun on the occasion! Not even allowing us a dance! I call it "real shabby" of you, Scaramouch!'

CHAPTER XXVI.

AUTUMN LEAVES.

'AND now, child, I have told you what I think about it; and I hope you see how very foolish you are,' was the wind-up of a long lecture from Mrs. Tennent to Lisa, on the morning after everything had been settled. 'I don't mean to say any more, because both your uncle and Percy are so determined to have their own way, and have made all their arrangements without any consideration for my wishes; but I have no intention of letting you think you are right in what you are doing. On the contrary,' raising her voice and speaking emphatically, 'I think you are very wrong, and that you have been very much to blame all along. What business had a girl of your age to be thinking of such things? If you had had your thoughts properly engaged, you would have had no leisure for such nonsense, and you would never have been so silly as to encourage anything of the sort from Percy. Not only silly, indeed, but wrong, absolutely wrong; for in a child like you it showed great forwardness to have such ideas. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

'Why, aunt Helen?' Lisa asked, nothing daunted, though her cheeks were scarlet,—'why am I to be ashamed of myself? I don't see it was wrong. I couldn't help the thoughts coming. I didn't want them, and didn't ask for them; they came of themselves, and I don't know how I was to prevent them. It would have been very strange, I think, if I hadn't cared for Percy, for he has been very kind and good to me. I can't help loving him, and loving him very dearly too; and——'

'Lisa! I am shocked! The idea of talking like that! I am ashamed of you!'

'I can't help it if you are, aunt Helen. It's no use looking at me in that way. It is the truth. I do love him very dearly indeed—far better than anybody else in all the world; and I don't see what harm there is in saying it. I shall tell him so in church soon before everybody, and why should I mind your knowing it now? If I didn't love him, you know, I shouldn't marry him. But I do; and when he asked me if I did, I couldn't say what wasn't true. I couldn't tell him I didn't, when I did. That wouldn't have been right, I am sure. You used to tell me it was very wicked to tell stories, and that would have been a downright one.' And in spite of her blushes, Lisa's eyes were dancing with suppressed delight at having, as she considered, so completely silenced her aunt's remarks.

Mrs. Tennent looked at her with displeased gravity. 'I think the sooner the subject is dropped, Lisa, the

better. I don't wish to hear any more of it; though I must say a little less levity on your part would be more modest and becoming. I don't like to see young girls wanting in respect either to themselves or others. However, we will say nothing more about it, if you please. I hope you will learn soon to see your position in a more proper and serious light; and I am sure it is time you did, if you ever mean to do so, for you have not very long before you to think about it. That reminds me, by-the-bye, of something else I wished to say to you—and that is about your outfit. Of course I shall see to that. Your uncle told me he should like it to be the same in every respect as one of your cousins' would be; but I don't myself consider that at all necessary. Your position is not the same; and you know that in a few years there would have been even a greater difference between you. You can't expect, therefore, to have things as Isabel or Elinor would if they married; and you had better understand at once that you will not. I shall get you all I think proper, but it will not be exactly what they would have; nor do I wish you to fancy it is.'

Lisa was silent. She was accustomed to hear of her inferiority to her cousins, but the reminder was none the more than pleasant on that account; and there was something in her aunt's tone that brought the tears to her eyes. She said nothing, however, and only stood waiting for what more might be coming; and after

pausing for a moment, Mrs. Tennent rose, and unlocking her dressing-case took something from it.

'I suppose you may as well have that now,' she said, holding it out without looking at her niece. 'It was sent from Germany in the spring. I believe your father gave it.'

It was a gold locket set with turquoises, and Lisa took it with a trembling hand. She did not know that when everything else had been sold for bread, one treasure had been kept, the last relic of better and happier days. And well for her she did not—that she did not know the whole of the history attached to that little ornament, of all that had been gone through to keep it. It was pain enough to look at it as it was.

'I shall never wear it,' she said, in a low voice; her colour growing deeper and deeper, and the large tears which had gathered in her eyes before, coming down fast now.

'Very well, do what you like with it; it is nothing to me. And now go away, child. You understand about your things—that I shall get what I think proper, and expect you to be satisfied; as of course you ought to be; and grateful, too; for, as you know, you have no claim upon your uncle. With his large family, nobody could ever have expected him to provide for you; and it is a great thing for you to have had a home here so long. You must be thankful now for what is done, and not look to

have things as if you were one of your cousins. You have no *right* to anything; you must remember that. Do you hear?' For Lisa's head was bent, and her eyes were fixed upon the locket with a long sad gaze, as if her thoughts were on that, and not on what her aunt was saying. She started now.

'Yes, I heard.' And so she had, the words at least, though she did not quite realise their meaning. She was only conscious, as she went away, of a sense of extreme loneliness; of being very much in the way, and not wanted where she was. Well, that feeling would be gone soon. Percy would not think her a burden, though she did come to him penniless, with nothing but herself and her love to give him. And in that thought there was comfort; not only then, but in much that came to try her during the last few weeks of her life at the Priory.

Strange weeks they were—curiously unlike any others she had ever known there; and whether happiness or pain predominated, she would have found it hard to say. Perhaps the latter; for not only was there the recollection of her mother to cross her mind with its dark shadow even in her happiest moments—those which were spent with Percy—but the pleasure, too, of those moments was often marred in other and different ways; and not the least annoying of these, to her shy nature, was the notice into which her engagement brought her when it came to be generally known. Great was the astonishment it created in all Atherstone; and many

were the comments passed on it, and the discusssions to which it gave rise; and although of course she did not hear all these, she gathered quite enough to become aware that it was the topic of conversation everywhere, and that she herself was the subject of remark wherever she appeared. It was a sort of notice from which she shrank with the utmost repugnance; and frank and open as she had been at first in the acknowledgment of her attachment when it was known only to those immediately about her, she disliked exceedingly to have it canvassed by ordinary acquaintance; and the simple confidence of manner with which, in the first days of their engagement, she had always met Percy, changed by degrees into a timid and childishly dignified reserve in the presence of others.

Whether he quite approved of this change was doubtful. He looked so grave, at times, that the question might be considered more than open; and the expression of his face once or twice occasioned Lisa no small misgivings. She feared her constraint had given him pain; and in great contrition she tried to explain the feelings that made her so silent and reserved.

'It isn't that I'm not thinking of you, and wanting to be with you just as much as I always did; you mustn't fancy anything else, Percy. But somehow I can't bear people to talk about us and make remarks when we are together; as if our love for each other were something quite common and belonged to them as much as to

us. They don't know what we feel, and I don't like them to look and talk as if they did. Please don't mind, therefore, if I don't say much to you when everybody is by—if I talk to anyone else instead—and perhaps don't speak to you at all. You will know what I am thinking all the time, won't you? You won't fancy I am going to change, or anything of that sort? You are quite sure it is impossible.'

'Yes, dear, I know it is;' his doubts, whatever they might have been, vanishing before the winning smile with which this assertion was made; one of those smiles that often came for him, and which would have obtained his belief for anything she chose to aver, had it been the wildest and most improbable fact imaginable. He would as soon have thought of doubting himself as her after that; and one comfort through it all was, that it would not last very long—that in a few weeks it would all be over, and no one would be able to come between them any more.

But it was not only the remarks of friends that so often kept Lisa from him, and made her shun his eye and presence so much that anyone unacquainted with what was going on might often have supposed them utterly indifferent, if not strangers, to each other. It was the knowledge that their engagement was disapproved by some of their own family; and that even the commonest attentions and marks of affection bestowed on her by Percy seemed to deepen the estrangement

between her and Isabel, and brought down upon her also many cold words and looks from her aunt which, at times, were anything but easy to bear, making her shrink into herself, and become more shy and timid than ever.

Some allowance, however, was to be made for Mrs. Tennent's displeasure; for, in addition to her original reasons for objecting to her niece's marriage, there was another which affected her more nearly, inasmuch as it was to bring about a change in her household, for which she was by no means prepared; and which threatened her with such serious inconvenience, that no one, who knew anything of her, could feel surprise at her not regarding the innocent cause of it with much favour. This was nothing else than the intended departure of Lane.

'Eh, Miss Lisa! what have you done?' had been the old nurse's exclamation of dismay, when her darling first hung about her neck and told her 'she was not going to live at the Priory much longer—that in a very little time she was to marry her cousin and go away with him.'

'Eh, dear, but you don't know what you're doing! Going to marry him, do you say? It's not true, surely. Why my darling, he's not good enough for you. He's too old, and not handsome enough, and—'

'I don't like handsome men,' Lisa interrupted. 'And he's not a bit too old. I like him all the better for

being older than I am. He is quite good enough for me any day; and a great deal too good. You don't half know him, Lane dear, or you wouldn't talk in that way.' And she smothered her old nurse with kisses, till she almost took away her breath.

'Oh, Miss Lisa, what a child you are! I never saw anybody like you; and look what a mess you're making of my cap! I declare it's not fit to be seen; it never is when you come near me.' And Lane, who prided herself upon her stiffly-starched borders, had to get up and readjust her head-gear at the glass before she could proceed with her sentiments. 'I always thought, Miss Lisa,' coming back to her chair, 'I always thought you would do a deal better for yourself. I know some one else who'd be glad enough, I'm sure, to have you; and he is handsome and rich, and everything else you could want. You'd have done better to have chosen him; and I always thought you would. Ay, dear, you know who I mean; I see that by your colour. It's a pity you didn't wait for him.'

'I don't like him,' Lisa said, scornfully. 'Fancy comparing them! Oh, Lane, how much you know about it!'

Lane gave a little sigh. She had been indulging in visions of greatness for her dear Miss Lisa—visions founded on observations she had made about the picnic time that summer—and it was mortifying to discover there was no truth in them; that, after all, Mrs.

Pye's conclusions were likely to turn out more correct than her own.

'Well, dear, you know best, I suppose; but I thought you'd have done better—that I did. I should like to have seen you "my lady," and living at that fine place down there. Mr. Thorpe will have it all some day, they say; and plenty of money too. You could have done what you liked, and been as happy as a queen. I should have liked that for you.'

'Would you? I shouldn't have liked it for myself, then. I don't want Mr. Thorpe's place, or his money, or himself either. And fancy me "my lady!"' going off into a merry ringing laugh. 'I shouldn't know how to be one. I don't know what "my ladies" do or say; and I should want to run about and enjoy myself. I could never have done that at the Moat—it is such a dismal old place. Oh, Lane, how could you ever dream of such an absurd thing! Besides, you don't know how very much happier I am now!'

'Well, dear, I'm glad to hear it;' but in spite of this assurance there was another sigh. 'And I hope the captain—major isn't he now?—I hope he'll never do anything to make you change your mind. I know nothing against him, to be sure, except that he's neither young nor handsome, and not the man I'd have chosen for you, dear. But he's a soldier, and soldiers are never good for much; they never were, and never will be,' she continued, with a burst of so much acrimony

that it raised a conjecture in the mind of her auditor whether a certain faithless admirer of whom tradition spoke as connected with Lane's earlier days had not been in the military line. 'They are a sad lot, Miss Lisa! and it grieves me just terrible to think of your having to go and live among them all. You'll never be happy; you'll be wishing yourself back again, I'm thinking, before the year is out. However, dear, if you go, I go too; you must take me with you.'

'You, Lane?'

'Yes, dear,' in a coaxing tone. 'You won't leave me behind, will you? I couldn't stay here when you were gone, you know.'

'But Lane, you won't like it, will you? You were just saying I should be wishing myself back again, and what will you do? I am afraid you would never be comfortable. And then, too, you can't bear moving about; and perhaps we shall have to do that very often. We shall never stay long in one place, most likely.'

'Ay, I know that; it's tramp, tramp about the country, and never settling anywhere—here to-day and there to-morrow, and off to foreign parts without time to turn yourself round. But that's just what I was thinking of, Miss Lisa; for what you'll do all by yourself in such confusion and wandering about, is more than I can tell. You'll want somebody to look after you a bit, it seems to me; you'd be quite lost in all the bustle, with no one to see to things and take a little care of you.'

Lisa smiled. She thought there was some one already to do that, but Lane evidently did not consider a husband's protection by any means sufficient under the circumstances.

'And so, dear, I go with you,' she said, in a decided tone. 'You'll speak to the captain, won't you, and settle it for me, and—oh my cap, Miss Lisa! There it goes again!' as Lisa made a rush to embrace her.

'You dear old Lane! I shall like you to come so much! But—' she stopped short suddenly, 'what will aunt Helen say?' in some consternation. 'You were forgetting her; she won't like your leaving at all. It will make her very angry. I think—' she looked at her nurse doubtfully. But Lane's purpose was fixed.

'I can't help it, Miss Lisa; she must be angry then; but we are not slaves in this country, and she can't keep me if I have a mind to go. Not but that it will grieve me sorely to leave Master Georgie and all of them; it will half break my heart, indeed, I think to give them up when I've had the care of them so long; but it would be worse, dear, to see you go off no one knows where, and without a creature to look after you. You come first, you know; you always did, for I took you when you were born and I was with your mother before you. If anybody has a right to you, I have; so don't say another word about it; but just tell the captain I'm coming, and leave the rest to me.'

And in spite of Mrs. Tennent's remonstrances, to this

determination Lane adhered. It caused a grand commotion in the family in which she had reigned for so many years, not only as head nurse, but housekeeper; and in which capacities she had made herself so useful that it was no wonder the mistress, whose right hand she had been, should be seriously annoyed at her sudden resolution to leave; and not caring sufficiently for her niece to set the advantages of such a plan to her against the loss to herself, should only regard with increased displeasure, an event which was to be attended with so much inconvenience in her domestic arrangements. It so happened, therefore, that those last weeks of poor Lisa's life at the Priory were far from happy. Slights and trials in the home, where, although she had lived so long, she was still looked upon by some as little better than an intruder; and the doubts and fears which, even when love and trust are strongest, must often come over those before whom a new and untried future is opening—all these pressed upon her heavily and drearily; and, child as she was, seemed at times to weigh her down with their burden.

And so the last days of summer died out, and September came and passed away. The mornings and evenings grew very fresh, and autumnal mists hung on the hill-sides. Chill breezes often swept across the uplands, and woods were changing to brown and golden; and in the Priory garden the lawn and gravel-walks were strewn with the lime-trees' falling leaves. And

Lisa walked among them as she had done in days gone by; but her step by Percy's side was slower than it had once been, and there was something half of sadness at times in the glance of her large lustrous eyes as they watched the fading beauty of all around. She knew that long before the last leaf from those trees came down, she would be far away; and that when their boughs were once more clothed with green, her life at Atherstone would have become a dream.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST EVENING IN THE OLD HOUSE.

THE day before the wedding came, and everything been done—everything was ready. Last v had been paid—last good-byes said; and for the time Lisa was sitting where she had so often sat in old days that were gone now—on the hearthrug be the fire in the school-room by Mary's side, with hands clasped upon her cousin's knee and her h resting on them. She had just come back from C lands, and her bonnet lay on the floor beside her wh she had thrown it when she took it off, Prince ha mounted guard over it with his fore-paws on strings. It was getting dusk, and a mist was gathe over tree and shrub without; and the low voice of wind among the boughs above the casement win had something half sad in its tones; telling, it seen of long partings—of meetings that might never com and of all the thousand changes and chances that must bring; while never more could the past be a thing but a sealed book, or the happy times that been come back. And that they had been happy spite of many drawbacks, many unpleasantnesses, h

felt now that they were gone; and how much of their happiness had been owing to the gentle, loving care of the cousin who for long years had been a mother to her in everything but name, she knew now if she had never known it before. She remembered the kindness, the sympathy and the unvarying sweetness of temper under all provocations, the patience that had borne with her waywardness and carelessness, the untiring affection, which had nursed her in sickness, comforted her in trouble and shared her joys; and she felt that to leave Mary would be a very bitter trial—so bitter, that she hardly liked to think of it; and she shrank from that morrow's parting almost as if it were to be for ever.

For a long time she had sat in silence, watching the flicker of the firelight; but a deep sigh at last, made Mary stoop down to look at her face and ask what was the matter.

'What is it, dear? You are tired, I am afraid; you have been walking so much to-day.'

'No, I'm not. I was thinking, that was all—thinking what hard things good-byes are. I have had so many of them to-day, you know;' and there came another long sigh as she went in retrospection over the round of farewell visits she had been paying to half the poor people in the parish; all of them particular friends of hers, whom she had often been in the habit of going to see with her cousin, and who would have felt woefully hurt and slighted had she neglected a last call;

but whose lamentations at her approaching departu
curiously mingled with their good wishes for
happiness, had had anything but a cheering effect u
her spirits.

'I don't like to think how very long it may be befo
see everybody again. And then Mary, there's the hard
good-bye of all to come to-morrow! Oh, what shall I
when I haven't you with me any longer?' And she sei
her cousin's hand and squeezed it very tight as if she
not mean to let it go again. 'Mary, you have been so v
very kind to me. I can't bear to think of leaving y

There were hot tears falling on the hand she h
and Mary's only answer at first was a long kiss, for
own eyes were dimmed, and it was some minutes be
she could trust herself to speak. When she did, h
ever, though it was evidently an effort, her tones w
almost as cheerful as usual.

'I don't like it either, Lisa dear. I don't like part
with you; only I know you are going to be very hap
and I suppose we ought not to cry about tha
she laughed a little as she spoke, for a large tear ch
to come down at that moment. 'That was a mistake
didn't mean it. It would be very selfish of me to w
to keep you here when I know you are only going to
happier somewhere else. And it is not as if you w
going to live among strangers, or I knew there was
chance of seeing you again. I suppose you mean
ask me to pay you a visit sometimes?'

'Ah, Mary;' and Lisa brightened up considerably. 'When will you come? Soon? Will you let it be very soon? Oh how I wish you could live with us always!'

'Thank you, dear. I am afraid, though, that could hardly be managed. I have too much at present to do here; I don't think I could be spared to live away from home altogether. But I shall like to come and see you, and I hope it won't be very long before I do. We will have a very happy time together, then, Lisa.'

'Yes, so we will. I'll make everything so pleasant for you, Mary; you shall have things just as you like. And I shall be so glad for you to see what I am doing; and how well I am getting on. For I do mean to get on well; I mean to try hard to be just what I ought and to make Percy very happy. And don't you think I shall? Don't you think I can do things right if I try?'

'Yes, dear, to be sure you can; anybody can do what is right if they are only in earnest, and set about things in the right way.'

And Lisa knew from her cousin's tone what she meant. For a moment she was silent, and then she said, in a low voice, 'I shall try; and I think, Mary, it will be in the right way. I hope it will.' She sat looking at the fire again for some minutes lost in thought; but she turned round again at last with a smile. 'It will be a great pleasure when you do come, and it's something

to look forward to. I shall always be thinking of it. And when will it be? Directly we get to Portsmouth?'

'What, to-morrow four weeks! My dear Lisa, you don't mean to say you expect monthly visits! Think of the distance if there were nothing else to be considered! I can't afford to be running up and down the country in that way.'

'Well, at Christmas then. Mary, you must come at Christmas; indeed you must. Won't you promise me? Think how I shall want to see you and talk to you, and have you to set me right in all sorts of things. And it will seem such a long time till you have been. Please say it shall be at Christmas; and let us be very happy then.'

Mary smiled; but though she said it would not do to settle things so long beforehand, she admitted it would be very nice, and that if it could be managed she should like it exceedingly; and on hearing this, Lisa's spirits rose wonderfully, and she began immediately to form all kinds of pleasant plans for enjoyment while they were together; and in her delight at the thought of having her dear Mary to entertain in her own home, she contrived to talk away, for the time at least, all saddening recollections of the parting that must come first.

'It hardly seems right, though, for you to be coming to see me,' she remarked, after she had been expatiating for some time on what they would do when that happy

visit took place. 'It would have been much more proper for me to be going to see you. Mary, how I wish you would marry and come and live near us somewhere! How very pleasant it would be! I should like you so much to have a home of your own! I don't want you always to stay as you are now.'

'Why not?'

'Oh, I don't know; but you were meant to marry, I am sure. You would make such a good wife. And I don't like you to——'

'To be an old maid,' said Mary, smiling. 'But why should you dislike it, Lisa? There is nothing so very dreadful in the idea, is there? Old maids are not so disagreeable in these days that you should mind my being one. I think a great deal of good is done by some of them; and I may be one of the pleasant sort, you know, and make myself of so much use in the world that perhaps people may sometimes forget I have the misfortune not to be married, and may think me a very quiet, well-disposed sort of person. And I suppose you won't love me any the less, if I keep single all my life?'

'Mary, what an idea! But you would be sure to do good anyhow, whether you kept single or not; and—I should like you, besides being of use to other people, to be happy yourself at the same time.'

'And you think I am not happy now? Do I look so very miserable?'

Lisa laughed. 'Well, not exactly; that was ar thing for me to say certainly; for I don't thi ever saw anybody happier than you are, Mary wonder sometimes why you are. I know a to be sure why it is; but still I can't under exactly why you always look so happy—as if no could put you out. You don't have everythir you like I know—you have a great deal often to p you; but I have never seen you look miserable as people do. You seem as happy as the day is long

'And so I am—very happy indeed,' Mary said, a very bright smile. 'So much for your theory marrying, you see. No, Lisa dear, I will tell you I think about it. Marriage may be a very l thing; and sometimes it is sent as a great ble But when things stand in the way of it, and we it can't be, then we must find other interests to its place, and make ourselves happy in other way else it seems as if we were repining at our lot could not be satisfied with anything but what we s choose for ourselves. And that would be so ungra for why should we forget all the good things tha given us, and think only of the one we can't Why should not we trust that what is marked o us is for the best; and be very happy in that trus

'And you think, then, you are not meant to ma Lisa said, quickly.

'I don't think it is at all likely I ever shall.'

Lisa did not see her cousin's face as she spoke: she only heard her very quiet tones.

'But, Mary,' after a minute's pause, 'what makes you think so? You don't mind my asking, do you? For you are just the person I should have thought would marry; and I always fancied you would. Why should you think you won't?'

And then, as there was no answer at once, she looked up.

'Oh, Mary, what have I said! Have I vexed you? How very very silly of me to ask such questions, and make you unhappy. But I didn't know—' in great distress.

'No, dear, of course you did not,' said Mary, trying to smile. 'Never mind, Lisa, don't make yourself miserable; you have not vexed me at all. It was only for a minute. I was thinking of something; thinking how different things might have been if—if—'

'Don't Mary, don't tell me anything,' Lisa exclaimed, beseechingly. 'I am so sorry. I never meant to give you pain.'

'No more you did; don't fancy it, dear. And it is so long ago now, that I don't know why I should mind talking of it. Ten—twelve—yes, nearly thirteen years ago,' and she thought a little. 'Thirteen years ago. I was not much older then, than you are, Lisa. I fancied then I was going some day to be happy in—in the way you want me to be,' she said, stroking her cousin's

hair fondly; though it was some little time before she went on. 'We were engaged, we had been boy and girl together. He was three years older than I was; and so good and clever. I was very proud of him. But he was very poor, and of course we knew we should have to wait a long time. We had been engaged two years, and then he had an appointment offered him in India; it was a much better one than he was ever likely to get in England, and we thought he ought to take it. And in ten years he hoped to have enough to marry on, and then he was to come back for me.'

'Ten years! And you were never to see him all that time? Oh, Mary!'

'Yes, dear; it seemed a long, dreary time to wait. But I did not know then I should have to wait much longer than that before I saw him again. I had one letter from him after he left—they were off St. Helena then—and I never had another.'

Lisa looked up quickly. 'What do you mean, Mary? Did he—was he—?'

'The vessel never reached India; they were never heard of afterwards.'

'Oh, Mary!' and Lisa covered her face with her hands, and for a long time there was a silence.

'But are you sure—quite sure?' she said, at last. 'Did you never hear anything at all?'

'Not a word. I hoped on for months and months—

long after every one else had given them up; but I knew at last how it was. I felt he was really gone.' There was a sigh as she spoke, but no tears; only Lisa's were falling fast.

'Mary, how miserable you must have been! I wonder you didn't die!' she said in a low voice, and with a shudder. 'If Percy were taken from me like that, I should die. I know I should.'

'No, Lisa dear, you would not; people don't die so easily; nor were we ever meant to give ourselves up to grief in that way. But I was miserable at first—very miserable, and wicked too. I had all sorts of hard, bad thoughts, and was very wrong. But I began to see things differently after a time, and I found then there was a great deal for me to do, and a great deal left to make me happy, if I chose to be so. And it was then, too, Lisa, that you came to us; and when I had the care of you, and you began to love me as you very soon did, then that terrible blank filled up by degrees. It was you who helped most to make me happy again.'

'By being naughty and troublesome; and teasing you all day long;' Lisa exclaimed, with something between a laugh and a sob. 'Oh, Mary, what a torment I have been to you! And you so patient, so good, to me all the time! And I never guessed, when I was plaguing you so, all you had to make you wretched. What a bad, good-for-nothing creature I have been!'

'Have you? I don't think you need call yo
such hard names, Lisa. You have been anythin
good-for-nothing to me. Your love has been som
worth having. And I don't think I shall lose i
now. You won't love me any the less because y
going away?'

'Love you any the less! I love you ten hu
times more now than I ever did; if that were p
at least; but I don't think it is. And I should
funny sort of heart, Mary, if I couldn't love you
I was away from you. I shall always be think
you; and I shall never, never forget all you
done for me.' She looked as if she would have li
say a good deal more, but her words just then di
come quite so readily as usual and she was silent.
a pause, however, she added, wistfully, 'And it
is true, Mary? After all, that you are really hap

'Yes, indeed I am;' and no one who had seen M
face at that moment would have doubted her
'Much happier than I can tell you. With su
kind father, and a home where I can be useful
with so many people to care for me, it would b
grateful to be miserable because my life is not e
what I should have chosen for myself. And
there is always one hope I have—it is not a
thought I should never see him again.' Her
tenance lighted up as she spoke, 'Yes, Lisa dear

added after a minute's pause, 'I am very happy—very happy indeed; there is a better kind of happiness than that which comes from having things just as we like.'

It was a truth which Lisa, with that face before her, could most fully realise; nor could all the sermons in the world have preached such a lesson to her, as did the thought of the patient, cheerful, and self-denying life of which for years she had been a witness, but which until now she had only half understood. That her own might be something like it—that the same hopes, the same purposes, at any rate, might be hers, was at that moment her most earnest wish. And what time could be more fitting to begin to act upon such a wish than when she was about to say good-bye to the scenes of her childhood, and enter on new ties and new duties in another home?

She did not say much—her heart was too full for that; but as she sat on in the dusk of that still October evening, going over the past—the careless, unthinking past—and dwelling on the future that lay before her, unknown and shadowy indeed, but still full of hope, and looking very bright even in its vagueness, her thoughts were turned into something more than mere wishes that the days which were coming might be better than those that were gone. There was an earnest prayer for higher aims, and more strength of purpose, than she had ever yet possessed; and the very few words which were all Mary then

said to her in the way of advice or direction, far to strengthen the impressions and resolves of hour. They went all the farther, perhaps, be they were so few; and more still because they borne out by her cousin's own practice. Lisa r forgot them.

They sat alone in the dusk for some little time; then there was another very quiet half-hour Percy, who had come to look for her, joined th and they stirred up the fire and had a long talk their future plans and Mary's promised visit, w as Lisa had hoped, was finally settled for Christm nothing should happen to prevent it. And then tea, at which she presided as usual, for although had for some weeks past been promoted to the dinner, she had never yet given up her school-r habits; and on this last day of all she was less li than ever to do so. In spite of some sad thou too, it was rather a merry affair, for Arthur came as he often did at that time, and made a great de fun—talking as much nonsense as usual, or per rather more; and eliciting shouts of laughter from children by his descriptions of the adventures P and Lisa were likely to meet with on their wed tour.

Rouen, Paris, and home by Brussels was the gramme marked out, and a very common and h neyed one it was, Arthur had all along decla

asserting that when he married he meant to take a trip to the North Cape, or the Mountains of the Moon; and he wondered they did not do the same; or, as their time was limited, why not have paid a visit to the Feroë Isles, or even to the Orkneys; or, better still, have taken a lodging in the city, an arrangement which would have been decidedly original, and would have given Lisa an opportunity of inspecting the wonders of the metropolis, with which at present she was almost entirely unacquainted.

Lisa, however, thought she could see London at some other time; and never having been abroad or even to the sea-side, she had been so childishly delighted when the first idea of a foreign tour was started, that Percy had taken it up immediately; and although Paris was not a place he particularly cared for himself, he soon discovered that to her it would be the greatest of pleasures to go there; and having once made this discovery, he had not been long in arranging their route and plans.

Arthur's animadversions were therefore disregarded; and Lisa, who did not trouble herself very much about things being common if they were new to her; and who had no particular wish to be unlike other people, thought the whole arrangement the most charming that could possibly have been devised; and anticipated all sorts of pleasure and amusement in the course of her travels.

She joined quite as much now as any one
merriment that went on chiefly at her expense; f
dislike to French, and the never-failing blunders
had always characterised her attempts, or rathe
attempts, to carry on a conversation with M
Ricard in that language, were matters of notoriet
was Arthur at all likely to make the least of
His account of the mistakes she was sure to
whenever she opened her mouth, and the puzzle
would be to the polite Monsieurs among whom sh
going, kept the table in an uproar; and made tha
school-room tea far more lively than it would othe
have been. Far more lively, too, than the d
down stairs afterwards, which, from some cause or
was very stiff and formal, every one seeming mo
less constrained, and even the change to the dra
room made but little difference. For various re
they were a dull and silent party, and the music
Arthur got up in the hope of creating a diversion,
raising people's spirits, failed to have the desired e
Rather the contrary, indeed; for at the very comme
ment, Lisa, who had been called upon to sing a
with Mary, broke down suddenly, and was oblige
leave the piano. It was a piece they had often
together, and in the practising of which her co
had taken great trouble with her; and the thought
that time was all over—that she had done with M
teaching for ever, was too much for her; and after

or two ineffectual endeavours to steady her voice, she gave up the attempt and rushed away; a proceeding which called forth some rather severe remarks from Mrs. Tennent on the subject of affectation, and other nonsense; and which, by infecting Elinor with a disposition to cry, brought the vocal part of the performance to a speedy conclusion. The instrumental, however, continued under Arthur's superintendence; and when he could get no one else to play, he filled up the pauses by picking out tunes for himself, or running over impromptus, which if not very melodious, served to cover conversational and other deficiencies, and broke the monotony of the evening.

But it came to an end at length. And when good nights had been exchanged, and Lisa was alone for the last time in her little room, she lingered long at her window, unable to realise to herself that her life at the Priory had almost drawn to its close; and that at that hour on the morrow she would be far away from the place that for so many years had been her home. She looked round on the bare walls, the uncarpeted floor, and the shabby furniture, and she felt it would cost her a pang to leave even these; and then she turned again to the window, and looked out into the garden where, through the mist, the moonlight was shining on the lawn, and on the half leafless lime-trees that shaded the green-walk, where as a child she had danced and played, where lately

she had so often sat and talked with Percy, and where he had first told her of his love. There, too, among the trees close by was the old church, where on the morrow she was to plight her troth to him; and there were its chimes ringing out now as they had rung for years, and as they would go on ringing still, when she was not there to hear them. Familiar sights and sounds they all were; and parting from familiar things must always bring a pang, even when they are to be left for greater happiness. And that the change that was coming would bring her happiness, Lisa did not doubt. She had perfect, unbounded trust in him with whom she was going; and not the shadow of a misgiving crossed her mind when thinking of the future with him; but still she could not gaze on things that had been connected with the joys and sorrows of so much of her young life, and think unmoved that she was looking at them all for the last time for very long—it might even be for ever. Perhaps she might never see them again—never come back there; and if she did, she could never be again what she had been—her childish days would be far away, then, in the vanished past. It was with a long-drawn sigh that she turned at last from her window and slowly prepared for rest; and when she knelt to pray that night her prayers were much longer than usual, and very earnest; and her young face looked grave in its intensity of thought, when late at length she fell asleep

to dream, not of the coming morrow, but of times gone by; and to fancy herself again a little child sitting by Mary's side, and learning from her all the best and holiest lessons that had ever helped to influence and soften her wild impetuous nature.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WEDDING BELLS.

IT was a quiet wedding party that met in the Priory drawing-room on the following morning, none but a few very near relations having been asked to be present at the ceremony.

But although their own numbers were so small, poor Lisa's wishes for privacy on the occasion were not exactly attained; for, in spite of all the precautions that had been taken to keep the day a secret to all but the immediate household, it had become very generally known; and her uncle being, in consequence of his connection with so much of what went on in Atherstone, a sort of public character in the place, and her own youth and circumstances having created great interest, the church was early filled with a crowd, not only of friends and acquaintance, but also of strangers from all parts of the town.

Percy too, being a Crimean hero, and one of whom Atherstone might well be proud, was the subject of no small curiosity at such a time; though as he came in at the chancel door with Arthur, and for a few minutes

they stood alone near the altar while waiting for the rest of the bridal party, there were not a few who marvelled at Lisa's choice, and who wondered what there could be in that plain, dark, sombre-looking man to have won the heart of one so young and lovely. The prettiest bride that had been seen in the old church for many a long day, as every one said who saw her then; though she herself was unconscious of the gaze of admiration and the many curious looks that followed her as she passed up the aisle. Her thoughts were all given to the only person of whose presence there she really knew anything; and when meeting him and kneeling by his side, everything else was forgotten.

It was a bright autumnal morning; and the fresh wind stirred among the trees that bordered the churchyard wall, bringing down in showers their brown and yellow leaves, and then wandering on among the tombstones, made its way in at the open chancel door, to play among the folds of Lisa's long white veil and dress; while through a stained window near, the sun's rays fell with a chastened glow on her bent head and golden hair, and lighted up with a glory that was hardly of earth, the pale, pure beauty of her youthful face. There was not a trace of colour in it then, but there were no other signs of agitation about her; and although her voice, when she spoke the solemn words that bound her for life, was very low, it was clear and unfaltering; and none who heard those earnest tones, could have doubted that they came

from her very heart. Few, too, who saw the look with which as they rose from their knees, she raised her eyes to Percy's, ever forgot it.

The business of signing names was soon over; and then the little party passed through the church once more, and out at the western door; Lisa, however, hardly so unconscious now, as she had been before, of the gaze of so many; and when, as they were leaving the porch, a little girl whom she knew stepped forward to offer her a bouquet, a deep blush mounted to her pale face as she looked up and became aware of the number of curious eyes fixed upon her. A smile, very shy, but very sweet, was the only thanks she could give for the flowers; and Percy felt her hand trembling on his arm as he led her on after that moment's pause. Out into the bright sunshine they went; the bells in the old tower ringing merrily, and fresh airs blowing round them; while in the trees above their heads the robins sang, and ever floating downward came the autumn leaves, clustering about their path. They were crushed beneath Percy's firm tread, and Lisa's dress swept them as she passed; and Mary, whose eyes half dimmed with tears, had never been taken from 'her child,' saw her smile once as she stopped for a moment, to brush away some that had caught in her veil and were clinging there.

Poor Mary! She had hard work that morning to keep back her tears and wear a cheerful countenance

through all the sad thoughts that came crowding over her; but she did her part bravely, and no one guessed the pang she felt each time she looked at the very fair childish face she loved so well, and which she knew she should miss so sadly in the long days to come. It seemed as if she could hardly look at it enough, or make the most of the short remainder of the time they were to be together, so often did her eye turn to the little figure at her brother's side, and so lingering was her glance when it rested there. But it would not do to show what she was feeling, and least of all to let Lisa suspect it—Lisa, whose wistful gaze met hers at times almost imploringly, as if she longed to read her thoughts, and were only half certain of her own happiness, where not assured of her cousin's also. It would not do to let her know what that parting must be; and for her sake Mary's face wore a cheerful smile and she would not let her spirits flag.

But the time for the last good-byes came at length. When breakfast was over, Lisa went to her room to change her dress, and Mary went with her. She had intended to make a great deal of that half-hour, to say all sorts of things that until then had been left unsaid; but now it was really come she could not speak a word, —she could only do what there was to be done in silence; while Lisa, who seemed equally afraid to trust the sound of her own voice, hurried through her preparations as if unwilling to give herself time to think;

and when she was ready—when her few remaining things had been packed and carried away, she tied on her bonnet hastily and left the room without even pausing for one last look round.

They went down stairs together, and in the hall found all the rest of the party assembled; Dr. Tennent, in a fidget as usual on such occasions, thinking they would miss the train.

'Good-bye, my child,' he said, folding Lisa in his arms as she came up to him. 'You have no time to lose. Percy, take good care of her and make her happy.' And with a long kiss he let her go again to hurry her through the rest of her leave-takings.

'Good-bye, Lisa; I hope you will remember what has been said to you and do your duty as you ought,' was Mrs. Tennent's farewell; and Lisa looked up at her with her large beseeching eyes.

'Aunt Helen, I have vexed you very often; given you a great deal of trouble, I am afraid. I am very sorry—won't you forgive me before I go?'

Mrs. Tennent smiled rather coldly. 'Forgive you! Oh, yes, child, I am not angry with you; though you certainly have never taken much pains to please me. But it is not the way of the world to be too grateful for kindness, so I am not likely to be disappointed at your being no better than the rest of them. And I am glad you see your faults now, though it would have been better if you had done so a little sooner, and

shown your sorrow by actions rather than words. But I am not angry with you. Good-bye.'

And then came a long round of good-byes from every one, and a very quiet one from Isabel, with a still quieter, 'I hope you will be happy, Lisa,' in a tone of considerable magnanimity, which had a more freezing effect than was perhaps intended. But when Lisa came to Mary, she held her tight in a close clinging embrace that was almost convulsive in its grasp, though not a word was uttered by her, and even tears were kept back.

'God bless you, my darling,' Mary whispered; it was all she could say, and there was a tighter pressure still, but not a sound from Lisa.

'Now then, my child! you can't stay there,' exclaimed her uncle, in his kind voice, but looking more in a fidget than ever. 'Let her go, Mary, they'll lose the train if they don't mind.' And Lisa loosened her hold then; but as she turned away, she came upon Bär, sitting on the door-mat—Bär, the old house-dog, with whom she had played and run races ever since she had been a little child, and who loved her even better than he loved his master; and at sight of him came the climax to her pent-up feelings. She flung herself on the floor beside him, and throwing her arms around his neck she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

'Hallo, Mrs. Percy Tennent!' exclaimed Arthur, who, in a state of great excitement, had been walking about all this time with an old white shoe in his hand. 'Hallo,

Mrs. Percy, I think you forget you are married. Remember your dignity if you please; the floor is not the proper place for you now.' A speech which caused a diversion by raising a laugh; and Lisa, a little ashamed of herself for having given way just at the last, when she had meant to go off so bravely, got up hastily and brushed away her tears. She would not even look round again, but without a word, let her uncle lead her to the carriage. Percy followed her, and took his seat by her side, and the next minute they were off; Arthur carrying out his intention of being the first to wish them good luck in orthodox fashion, by taking the initiative in the shower of old shoes that followed them; much to the indignation of Elinor, the owner of the slipper of which he had possessed himself for the occasion, and who had all along been protesting against such a disposal of her property, which she declared was not half worn out, and would have done for another dance. There was a great deal of laughing and talking; and in the midst of it all came a loud cry from little George, who had been looking on wonderingly during the parting, and who, having now seemingly realised the fact that his dear Lisa was gone, suddenly set up a howl of mingled sorrow and defiance which startled everybody, and called forth a large amount of sympathy and comfort from all sides.

And in the prevailing confusion Mary made her escape, and stole away upstairs. To Lisa's deserted room

first, where she picked up a stray glove, a handkerchief, and one or two other little things that had been left there; and after putting them carefully away and standing for some minutes looking round on everything with a dreary aching sense of desolation at her heart, she went to her own room and sat down where, the day before, she had sat with her cousin beside her. The red light of the autumn sun streamed in through the open window, and she watched its play upon the floor, and the dance of the shadows from the lime-tree leaves, and felt that for her the best sunshine of the house was gone—that the light and brightness of her life, for a time at least, had passed away. And her thoughts went back then to another time, long, long ago, when far more sad and desolate than now, she had sat there, and a little child had come to comfort her; a little child of winning beauty, with golden hair, and wild, dark, shy eyes; whose loving ways and warm affection had roused her from her grief, and given her new hopes, new interests. For years that child had been her first thought, her chief care; and in her love she had found her greatest earthly happiness. And to-day she had given her up. To-day she had seen her, a child still and lovely as ever, stand at the altar as a bride, and had heard her bid farewell to the home where she had lived for so many years. And in fancy, Mary saw before her still that sweet girlish face in all its beauty, and felt round her yet the loving arms that had been so unwilling to let her go. Very

long it *might* be before she felt their clinging embrace again; and long, very long, it *must* be before the blank which that day had made in her life could once more be filled up; though even in her sorrow then she forgot to be selfish.

'Dear little Lisa!' she said to herself with a sigh, 'my little Lisa, my own child! It is very hard to let you go. But you will be happy—I hope—yes, I am sure you will—very, very happy—and I must be so too, to know that you are. And so I am—yes, I am really happy; I would not have to-day undone if I could.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

'THIS SWEET WEE WIFE O' MINE.'

THE long winter months were over, and spring, with its sunshine and its showers, its opening leaves, its early flowers and lengthening days, had come round once more. It was one bright afternoon late in April that Arthur Darrell stood upon the platform at the Gainsford station, watching a London train which was slowly coming in more than twenty minutes after its time.

'Ah Janet, there you are!' he exclaimed in some impatience, as he caught sight of a well-known face at one of the carriage windows. 'Well, better late than never. I began to think you wouldn't come at all—that some accident had happened. What has made you so behind-hand?' And he made desperate attempts while speaking to open the door of the carriage in which his sister-in-law was seated. Finding his efforts useless, he was about to call to a porter to effect the required deliverance, when an evidently unexpected apparition behind Janet made him pause suddenly. Among several other faces, there was one that he cer-

tainly ought to have recognised, but of whose identity, perhaps from the fact of not looking for it there, he seemed for the moment extremely doubtful; and there was such a curious expression of mute perplexity in his countenance that Janet was highly amused. Her laugh recalled him to himself.

'Why Nelly,' he exclaimed then, 'where on earth did you spring from? and Isabel, too, I declare! as another face looked out of the window. 'Well, there's no end to wonders in this world; nor,' with a very low bow to his cousins, 'to the rewards that virtue meets with. Here have I been fuming and raging for the last half hour; first at having to come down here at all, and next at being kept waiting such an unconscionable time; and now——'

'And now perhaps you will make yourself of some use;' said Janet a little testily, descending from the carriage, as the door was at length opened. 'You can leave your flourishing till we get home. Oh dear, how hot it is, and I am so tired! Take care of that box, Arthur, for goodness' sake, and don't turn it upside down in that fashion.'

'New bonnet, eh?' said Arthur, with an air of profound reverence.

'Nothing of the sort. You brought the carriage, of course?'

'I did, ma'am. You don't think I was going to walk a mile and a half such a day as this when I

could have a carriage for nothing? No, thank you. Besides, how was I to get you home without it? Did you expect me to carry all these small things?' looking in dismay at the various articles piled upon the seat.

'You can see they are carried across the platform, I suppose?' remarked Janet. 'And do be quick, please; the train will be going again in a minute, and we shall lose half of them if you don't mind. Not that there are so very many though, after all; for I make a point of never taking much luggage with me when I travel. It's so tiresome to look after.'

'So it is, ma'am; I quite agree with you,' said Arthur gravely. 'I was just wondering how you had contrived to manage with so little. Here it comes, big carpet bag, little ditto, travelling bags, one, two, three, four, five. And what are these? Oh, bonnet-boxes of course; they are too precious for the luggage-van. And here are three dressing-cases, and a bundle of cloaks, shawls, railroad-wrappers, &c. Did you expect a snow-storm, Janet, and take the precaution to provide against emergencies? Well, it was a wise proceeding, I've no doubt; it's always best to be on the safe side, and in such a climate as ours nobody knows what is going to happen. And here comes a sandwich case. I hope its contents are eaten, or they'll be rather stale. What's this, too? Another box? Oh for goodies! I know you always take sweets about with you. And that's all, I do believe, except books, newspapers, parasols and umbrellas, and—

three baskets; contents unknown, but perhaps consisting of eggs and butter. I wonder whether two trucks will be sufficient to take everything to the carriage?' in deep consideration of the pile before him.

'Nonsense, Arthur, do pray see about them quickly; you have no idea how tired I am.' And Janet walked off with a little bag and her own parasol in her hand, Isabel following her; but Elinor lingered behind to give her assistance with the smaller articles and help in the identification of divers trunks and portmanteaux from among the heavier luggage, which was to be sent after them. The business was a lengthy one apparently, from the time they were absent, and Janet's patience was almost exhausted with waiting for them. They made their appearance at last, however; and cloaks, bags, &c., having been tumbled into the carriage, they set off homewards, all in the highest spirits; even Elinor, who was so quiet generally, being roused into unusual animation, and looking about her with eager curiosity as they drove through the streets of Gainsford, a place where she had never been before. Not that there was much to be seen in them, for they were, for the most part, very narrow and dirty—worse even, as Janet remarked, than those of Atherstone, if that were possible; but then this was the old part of the town. On the other side close to the sea, it was very pleasant; and pleasanter still out towards the country, in which direction they were going.

'We are just in the most convenient situation,' she said; 'for we are near enough to the town to be able to get in easily, and see plenty of people; and yet we have the advantage of country air and country walks, besides not being far from the sea.'

'A little of everything, and in consequence neither fish, flesh, nor fowl,' remarked Arthur. 'And now then, you two worshipful ladies, let me hear what happy chance has brought you into this part of the world. I know nothing yet, you must remember, to account for your extraordinary appearance.'

'Nothing very extraordinary about it,' said Isabel, 'though perhaps it may be a little unexpected. It was always settled, you know, that I was to come some time this summer; and at first it was arranged that Mary and I should come together in August. But yesterday we were talking about it, and mamma said it would be much more convenient for only one of us to be away at a time; so Janet proposed I should pay my visit now and go back when Mary comes. And then we thought it would be no bad thing for Elinor to have a change too. She has not been well lately.'

'Hasn't she? Well, I should never have guessed it. I meant to pay her a compliment on her blooming looks, only I haven't had time yet.

Elinor certainly did look 'blooming' just then; but perhaps it was from fatigue and the heat of the day—for the weather had suddenly set in very warm, as it

sometimes does in April, and was almost oppressive. The afternoon sun, too, was shining full down upon them; and of course it was her anxiety to shade her face from that, which made her, at that moment, interpose her parasol so hastily between herself and Arthur, as he was turning to look at her.

'Thank you, Nelly—but you needn't put my eyes out,' he observed in an injured tone. 'And so that is what brought you all off in such unprecedented haste, is it? Well, I congratulate you on your spirit—I had no idea any of you could have devised and accomplished such an achievement as getting away at half a day's notice; for you left yesterday of course?'

'Yes, it was settled yesterday morning,' said Janet, 'and we were off in the afternoon. We came up to London with the Hirsts, and slept at their house; and Mr. Hirst saw us off this afternoon. Ah, here we are at home; and very glad I am! I don't know when I have been so tired!'

They were turning in at some white gates as she spoke; and a very pretty drive along the edge of a smooth well-kept lawn, and under some fine chestnut trees, took them up to the principal entrance of a villa-like residence, standing on sloping ground and covered with creepers of all sorts, which gave it a very cool and shady look, and made Elinor declare it one of the prettiest places she had ever seen. She was so delighted with it, that instead of going indoors when they

alighted, she went round with Arthur to have a look at the other side; while Janet disappeared in all haste to give orders for the accommodation of her unexpected visitors; and Isabel, who knew the place well, and did not care to walk about in the heat, took refuge in the drawing-room until her own room should be ready for her. They did not all meet again until nearly dinner-time; and then Elinor, who appeared to have been making a second tour of inspection, came in again from the garden in, what was for her, a state of perfect rapture, at the beauty of everything and the lovely views that were to be seen on all sides.

'I had no idea it was half so pretty,' she exclaimed. 'I wonder, Isabel, you never said anything about it. And Lisa too—though, to be sure, her letters have been full of other things. By the bye, where do they live, Janet? Is it far from here?'

'Yes—no—well, it's about ten minutes' walk. I don't know whether you call that far or not.'

'Not very far certainly,' said Elinor, half amused, and a little puzzled at her cousin's tone.

'Not far? Oh! well, she does then; far enough at least to prevent her coming very often. I suppose we shall see more of her now you are here; or else she is not in the habit of favouring us with too many visits.'

'A-hem,' said Arthur; 'that's rather good, Jenny; considering they have only been here since—when was it they came?'

'Before Christmas,' said Janet tartly. 'They were only at Portsmouth a few weeks.'

'Before Christmas, was it? I thought it was after. Well, anyhow, considering that two months of that time you have been away, and that for another three or four weeks Percy was ill and Lisa hardly ever out of the house, it's early to begin to complain of want of sociability.'

'Is it? I don't think so. Besides, it's easy, from a person's manner, to see whether they care for your acquaintance or not. Not that I am complaining, though; I don't trouble myself enough about it for that. If Lisa don't want to be friends with me, it's her own look-out, not mine. I am sure I was kind enough when she first came, and did everything I could to be friendly and sociable; but she never seemed to care to be much with me, so I gave up trying at last to be anything more than a common acquaintance. She is the most un-get-at-able girl I ever met, and as shy and stiff with me, sometimes, as if we were perfect strangers. I am sure nobody would guess we were such near connections, to see how seldom we meet and how little we know of each other.'

There was a very quiet, under sort of laugh from Arthur at this; but Isabel looked vexed.

'I am sure that is not what Percy wishes,' she said hastily. 'You may be quite certain, Janet, it is not his desire that you and Lisa should not be friends.'

'I dare say not,' said Janet with a smile. 'But the fact is, my dear, that I don't suppose his wishes have anything to do with it. Lisa does just what she pleases. She has her own way in everything; and as all she says and does is perfect in his eyes, he never thinks other people may not have cause to be quite so well satisfied as himself. He spoils her completely; and that's the truth. I never saw anybody make themselves so foolish as he does about her. He can't see anything else when she is in the room; and if you speak to him, he don't hear what you are saying—he is so taken up with listening to her. I have no patience with him; for really to hear him talk, you would suppose there was nobody like her in the world.'

A smothered laugh again from Arthur.

'What are you laughing for, Arthur?' Janet asked rather sharply. 'It is quite true—anyone can see how he worships her. You said so yourself one day, and that you were sure he didn't think the ground good enough for her to tread upon. No, I call it perfectly ridiculous, the way he goes on and the fuss he makes about her. And he is as proud as possible because she gets very much admired, and everybody thinks her extremely pretty. She is considered a great beauty, I believe—the belle of the place in fact. She made quite a sensation here in the winter; no one talked of anything else; and of course Percy was delighted, and made a great deal more of her than ever. It is my firm belief, indeed,

that her head is turned with all the nonsense she hears. She seems to me to think of nothing but dress, and extravagance of all sorts—though to be sure, as far as that goes, he encourages her in it all, so that he will only have himself to blame if they are half ruined—as I expect they will be some day.'

'Poor little Scaramouch!' remarked Arthur, 'she used to get scolded by everybody once upon a time, because she didn't trouble herself enough about her dress; and now you are finding fault with her for thinking too much of it. What is she to do between you all, I wonder?—remember the man and his ass, I suppose, and pay attention to nobody. I shall advise her to do so at any rate; though certainly, I don't myself see anything in her that wants altering. She always looks "uncommon" pretty, to be sure; but I don't know that she can help that, or that it's much of a fault either. And if Percy likes to see her well dressed, perhaps there is no harm in her consulting his taste rather than yours.'

'Perhaps not,' said Janet stiffly, 'particularly when it happens to agree with her own.'

'Well, I must say I consider Scaramouch wonderfully improved. Whether it's her dress or not, I don't know; but she's about the prettiest girl I have seen anywhere. And she has come out astonishingly, too, lately. I was never more surprised in my life than when I dined at their house, the first time after I came

down here, and saw that child sitting at the head of the table and really looking as if she knew what she was about. She was a wee bit nervous, certainly, for it was a large party; and she confessed to me privately that she didn't like it at all and was dreadfully frightened; but she didn't show it much. She really managed uncommonly well; I had no idea she would ever be so much of a woman in her ways, and I give her great credit for it; all the more, too, because I believe she would far rather any day amuse herself with a doll or a skipping-rope than play propriety in a drawing-room. It was only yesterday, indeed, that I caught her sitting on the floor nursing two kittens; and she looked so supremely happy over them, and so perfectly at home in such a position, that I was quite sure she must be in the habit of indulging in such amusements on the sly. And when I taxed her with it, she did not deny it—she only laughed, and seemed to consider it a very proper and rational employment.'

'I can quite believe it,' said Janet; 'she is so absurdly childish. You saw her yesterday, though, you say; did you tell her I was coming home?'

'I did; and she seemed highly delighted at the intelligence, and declared her intention of walking up this evening to see you.'

'This evening!'

'Yes,—I won't swear her motives for coming are

purely disinterested—that it is anxiety only to see you again that brings her; though I have no doubt that has a great deal to do with it. But there was something about a parcel from Mary that she was expecting, and which, it seems, she couldn't live without another day. I didn't ask particulars; but she was so eager about it, that I presume she is pretty sure to turn up some time this evening.'

'Very likely,' said Janet carelessly. 'Here is Ralph, however, turning up now, which is far more satisfactory just at present, for we can have our dinner; and I don't know what other people are, but I am half-starved. He might have come home a little earlier to-day, I think, as he knew I should be back. Who is that with him, too? Oh, Cunninghame; when did he come down, I wonder?'

And as she spoke, Mr. Thorpe's handsome face and figure appeared in the doorway. He was not a little astonished at sight of the unexpected visitors, but recovered himself sufficiently to be extremely polite; while Ralph, who followed him, evidently took their coming as a matter of course, expressing no surprise whatever on the subject. Whether indeed he were aware of their presence after he had shaken hands with them was rather doubtful, for he said very little, even to his wife, and during dinner was chiefly absorbed in his own meditations, leaving the conversational part of the entertainment to be supplied by his brother, who

certainly amply atoned for any deficiencies of his in that respect.

Arthur was in the highest spirits; delighted, perhaps, at the unwonted sociability of the present meeting after the solemn tête-à-tête dinners to which he had lately been accustomed; for his brother's house was his home now, and had been, since the termination of his college career early in the spring. That career had not given perfect satisfaction either to Ralph or to his uncle Dr. Tennent; both of whom declared themselves anything but pleased with the examinations he had passed, and with various reports of idleness and extravagance which had reached them from different quarters, and which he himself did not attempt to contradict. He had only looked penitent at the charges brought against him—had listened with the most placid good temper to everything his relations liked to say on the subject, and had then apparently dismissed it from his mind as done with and not worth troubling himself about any more. He had now a private tutorship in the neighbourhood of Gainsford for a few months while waiting for ordination, and several hours of each day were fully occupied with his duties; but his evenings were mostly spent at Lassell Lodge, and the addition of two of his cousins to the usual family party seemed by no means an unwelcome one. It was almost as good, he declared, as being at the Priory, and so Lisa would think, he was sure; she was always talking of the

old place, and would be delighted beyond measure at the sight of two faces from it; he only hoped she would keep in her sober senses on the occasion, a fact which he seemed to consider extremely doubtful; and he declared that he would not miss the spectacle of her first astonishment for worlds.

'And here she is!' was his exclamation, when, as they were all sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, a ring at the hall-bell told of the arrival of visitors. 'I'll lay anything it's little Scaramouch. Now then for a scene.' And as a servant, opening the door, announced 'Major and Mrs. Percy Tennent,' he rose from his seat and drew himself up in an ecstasy of suppressed expectation and amusement.

'Scaramouch' was decidedly not the appellation now for the very graceful girl who entered the room, and whose extreme beauty and quiet elegance of dress could not fail to attract the attention of even the most casual observer. Radiantly happy she looked, too, though with something still of her old shyness about her; and her eye, as it went round, had the same half-startled, wild-fawn-like glance, which all who had known little Lisa Kennedy remembered well. Unchanged also she was in many other respects, in spite of her alteration in outward appearance; for when, after passing Cunninghame, the first person whom she recognised, with a slight blush and a grave, self-possessed bow, she came suddenly upon Elinor, who was sitting

near him, the momentary childish look of bewildered surprise, and then the bright smile flashing like sunlight across her face, were Lisa all over; and so was the warm-hearted, eager embrace that followed.

'Nelly, dear Nelly! How delightful! Oh, how very glad I am! You came with Janet, did you? How very, very pleasant! And we never expected you!' And whether she were most inclined to laugh or cry seemed doubtful, while she poured out a whole torrent of expressions of delight and extravagant happiness; until Arthur, who was looking on as if it were a pantomimic performance got up for his benefit, interposed, and begged her to reserve the rest of her ecstasies, as there was some one else also there whom she had not yet seen. She turned round then.

'Not Mary, surely!'

And if it had been Mary, there was no saying what might not have happened; but as her eye met Isabel's, her face fell considerably. It was only for a moment; but the change was noticed, and although afterwards she looked, and really was, pleased to see her cousin, and although she talked as if she had forgotten all former unpleasantnesses between them, and did not even remember that there had been a time when they were not all they might have been to each other, yet Isabel herself did not forget it: and had she been inclined to do so, that first look of Lisa's would have recalled it to her mind. She set her down now as

insincere in her expressions of gladness; and with these thoughts in her mind, she could not even meet her brother with a smile, though seeing him again was the great pleasure she had expected in her Gainsford visit, and the one thing to which, for months, she had been looking forward.

He came up to her now as soon as he had discovered where she was, and the smile with which he did so ought surely to have won an answering one from her, and beguiled her out of her disagreeable meditations.

'Well, Isabel, how are you?' and he kissed her very warmly. 'We never expected anything half so pleasant as this when we were coming up. But why didn't you come straight to the cottage? I always thought your visit this summer was to be to us first?'

It was the old tone—the old manner; and Isabel's heart beat with a strange sensation of pleasure. He had some thought then, some love for her still, in spite of his new ties—in spite, too, of what had passed between them in the autumn. Like Lisa, indeed, he seemed to have forgotten all old misunderstandings and grievances; the truth being that they had both been so very happy in themselves, that they had had neither leisure nor inclination to dwell upon unpleasant things. But this very circumstance, which might, if Isabel had been so disposed, have set all right between them, gave her instead fresh cause for annoyance. She was vexed that Percy should have troubled himself so little about her

displeasure, as to have made himself happy when he knew she was not satisfied; and although there was nothing she longed for more than to feel she was again standing on old terms with him, yet, by some strange perversity, she held back now from meeting his advances. If he had appeared less sure of his ground, more solicitous as to the reception he was likely to have from her, she would most probably have given way; but that he should so completely ignore the past as to forget she had ever had reason to be displeased —perhaps even to imagine her reconciled to the marriage she had once so strongly disapproved—was more than she could tolerate; and with these feelings, her manner had but little of the warmth which her brother might naturally have expected under the circumstances; and he would most probably have been hurt at her coldness and constraint, had not his mind evidently been full of something else. It vexed her indeed to notice how often, while talking to her and asking questions about home news and doings, his eye was wandering off to Lisa; and how, unable from his short-sightedness to see her to his perfect satisfaction, he kept constantly putting up his glass to observe all her movements and watch her face while she was speaking. It was plain, even during the short half-hour they were at Lassell Lodge that evening, that Janet's account had not been much exaggerated—that he was wrapped up in his little wife, and worshipped her

with an almost adoring love. Every look and word betrayed it; and if Isabel had not been too much annoyed to be amused, she might have smiled sometimes to see how completely he was absorbed in Lisa and everything that concerned her.

They did not stay very long, for it seemed they had been out sketching somewhere and had only called there on their way home; and now Lisa said she was tired and wanted to get back. She had her parcel, too, for which she had come, and a letter with it; and her eagerness to open both was visible from the way in which she kept eyeing them as she held them very tight in her hand.

'Though why Mary thought it necessary to write when you were sure to hear everything from Isabel and Nelly, is more than I can make out,' said Arthur: 'more particularly as I know you have had one letter from her already this week; for you told me so yesterday. What in the world do you want another for so soon? I should have thought this day month would have done well enough.'

'This day month!' Lisa looked horrified. 'Why, I have a letter twice every week regularly—long letters crossed all over; I couldn't do without them. She tells me everything—every single thing that happens; and then I know all that's going on there. Oh, I wouldn't be without them for anything! And I write back and tell her all I do. It is very pleasant.'

'Is it? I am glad to hear it. I should have thought you were perfect plagues to each other. So much for my weak intellect, you see, which is not able to appreciate such an amount of epistolary composition. It makes me shudder, indeed, only to think of it.'

Lisa smiled, and grasped her precious letter a little tighter. For those weekly budgets made up to her in some measure for her long separation from her cousin. That Christmas visit to which she had looked forward so much at the time of her marriage, had never taken place; for it so happened that a course of measles, followed by whooping-cough, had that winter attacked all the younger members of the Priory party, and Mary had been wanted at home to take her share in nursing. And when it was all over, and she could be spared again, the spring was so far advanced that it had been thought better to defer her visit until late on in the summer, when Lisa would want some one with her. She was to make a long stay then, of two or three months at least; and the promise of this went far to reconcile poor Lisa to the postponement of her much-looked-for happiness; while the letters which kept up her interest in all home concerns were a never-failing source of pleasure to her. The one which she now had would be read and re-read a dozen times, and then locked up among her choicest treasures, to be pored over on many a future day, when she either wanted to refer to something that had happened or while away a lonely hour.

Arthur laughed at the eagerness of her grasp, as if she were afraid some one else meant to possess themselves of what was evidently so precious to her; and then he advised her to get home as fast as she could to read it, and not sit up too long learning it by heart.

'And I shall come down to-morrow to hear the news; though of course it's all stale. I'll call as I come back from the Crawfords' in the afternoon.'

'Yes, do,' said Lisa; 'and stay and dine with us. Isabel and Nelly are going to spend the day with me, and Janet says she will come in the evening, so that you must come too, and we shall be quite a family gathering.'

Perhaps she forgot in her eagerness that Mr. Thorpe was one of the family, but Percy supplied the deficiency; and when she heard him saying that he hoped Cunninghame would join them, she seconded the request in a way which, although shy and grave, left nothing to be found fault with. But the invitation was not accepted, Mr. Thorpe being, he said, already engaged.

'You never told me she was here, Janet!' was his remark when later in the evening he happened to find himself alone with his sister; and his tone of extreme annoyance made her look up in surprise.

'Never told you who was here?' she asked; her evident astonishment at the vexation he had betrayed recalling him to himself. He changed his manner, and laughed.

'Only Mrs. Percy Tennent. I was wondering where they had sprung from. But I suppose he's stationed here, and that accounts for their appearance in this part of the world.'

'Yes, they've been here three or four months. You won't see very much of her, though; unless her cousins' being here makes a difference just now; she does not generally come up very often. But I never knew before,' looking at him with great curiosity, 'that you had any particular objection to meeting her.'

'Any objection! Not in the least. Quite the contrary indeed; for I admire her exceedingly. I always did—at a distance, you know—not any nearer,' with a laugh. 'She's too much of a flirt to suit my taste as a relation—as a wife for instance. I don't like that style of thing; and she's an arrant little flirt;' his tone once more betraying great bitterness. 'She always was. She'd flirt with anyone, I believe.'

'With you amongst others,' said Janet, smiling, but puzzled again at his manner.

He coughed, and seemed slightly uneasy. 'Ah, well, yes—we were very good friends last year. To say the truth,' growing bolder, 'I think it was something more than flirting on her part then. I don't suppose she'd have had any objection to have me if I had asked her; but, of course——' Another convenient fit of coughing seized him at that moment. 'Well, one wants amusement—something to do sometimes; and that Moat was an awful

slow place. I was glad of anything to pass away the time there; and it isn't every day one can pick up such a pretty girl to talk nonsense to. I hope she never felt injured—thought I had gone too far, and that kind of thing, eh? I fancied she looked rather reproachful when she met me this evening; didn't it strike you so?' laughing a little. 'Well, she's a beauty and no mistake. I have some flowers still that she gave me the day before I left Atherstone—some flowers she had been wearing;' and Cunninghame assumed a sentimental air which suited him remarkably well. 'I wonder what she'd say if I showed them to her now. I think I will some day—see if she remembers them.'

'Don't let Major Tennent see them, that is all,' said Janet carelessly. 'He is dreadfully jealous of her. You couldn't offend him more than by letting him suppose she had ever had a thought for anybody but him.'

'Jealous, is he?' Cunninghame's face lighted up for a moment with a strange expression. 'Ah,' after some meditation, 'one don't wonder at it, though. What on earth could have made her think of him—such a plain, black-looking fellow as he is; and with nothing in the world to say for himself! She can't care for him; it's a moral impossibility;' and he surveyed his own handsome face and figure in an opposite mirror with a satisfaction which was, however, somewhat mixed with mortified astonishment that such charms could have been resisted. 'Well, I suppose she wanted to get

away from that place—they didn't make too much of her there; and no doubt she thought she'd have her own way and do as she liked if she married. That was it, depend upon it! But she'll get tired of him; she'll want a change by-and-by.'

And with this reflection he fell into another reverie, and dropped the subject.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COTTAGE BY THE SEA.

'THE cottage,' as Percy had called the small house in which he and Lisa were located for the time being (for he had shrunk from exposing her to the discomforts of barrack-life), stood close to the sea on high ground overlooking the beach, which was reached from their garden by steps cut in the rock. The house itself had nothing remarkable about it, being just such an one as might be met with any day in the neighbourhood of large towns, and having a dozen others all of the same size and build in every direction round; but somehow Lisa had come to be very much attached to it, and to think it very pretty; and she would have been sorry to leave it. For it was her home now, and a home where she was very happy—a home where she had found nothing but the sunshine of loving words and loving looks, and round which all sorts of bright and pleasant associations had gathered. She was fond and proud of it, too, as being her own—a place where she could do as she liked, and carry out all her little plans and fancies without let or hindrance from anyone; and many were the small changes and improvements she had devised,

until what was originally a house plainly furnished for letting, had become a really pretty place; the rooms filled with flowers, and birds, and books, and drawings, and the garden as gay as taste and care could make it.

That garden was her especial delight, for it was sheltered and private, with a magnificent view of the sea beyond, and close below a long reach of golden sand with a line of white breakers on it which she was never tired of watching, and the sound of whose waters ever rising and falling in measured cadence made perpetual music for her solitary hours. Never, too, was there such a garden as that for flowers. The borders were crowded with them, and the warm and sunny stone walk before the house had stands of greenhouse plants upon it filling up the spaces between the windows; while every nook and corner round had its rockery or old stump covered with trailing creepers. Flowers, it seemed, were Lisa's mania, and one which she indulged to her heart's content, for her house as well as garden was full of them, and every room was laden with their scent; vases standing on all the tables, and large pots in every window. She had, indeed, made a perfect bower of the place; and in this bower she was flitting about on the morning after Janet's return; very busy apparently in divers ways, though what she was doing it would have been hard to tell. Trifling away her time, her aunt would have said, and perhaps she would have been right; but there was no

one there to find fault with her. She had forgotten the sound of harsh words or the fear of meeting a severe look; so she went on amusing herself very much to her satisfaction—walking in and out of the window, feeding her birds and talking to them, arranging and rearranging her flowers, and pausing every now and then to cast a wistful glance at Percy, who was still seated at the breakfast-table with the morning paper before him. He had been poring over its contents for some time, and perhaps she thought at last he had read it quite long enough; for when she had fidgeted about for nearly a quarter of an hour, looked at the clock very often, and then stood for a few minutes as if making up her mind upon some undecided point, she stole across the room, and coming up to the back of his chair, she roused him suddenly from his studies by throwing her arms round his neck as she had sometimes done round Mary in former days, and half smothering him in her eager embrace.

'My dear Lisa, what is it?' he asked, as soon as he could speak. 'You always treat me in that barbarous fashion when you want to get anything out of me. What is it now?'

There was another squeeze. 'I want you to put away that horrid paper. You have been reading it such an immense time, I'm sure you must know it by heart. Won't you leave the rest till this evening?'

He smiled as he tossed it on to a chair near. 'There

it goes, little woman. Is that all you want, or is there anything more? I suppose so, as you are hiding yourself there. Why don't you come round where I can see you?' drawing her from the back of his chair.

Lisa planted herself on his knee, and looked a little shy, as she did sometimes when preferring her requests; more as a sort of form it must have been than for any other reason—a kind of deference, perhaps, paid to his superior age and gravity; for she was perfectly aware that her wish was law, and that anything she liked to ask, whether reasonable or unreasonable, would be sure to be granted if it were within the range of possibility. She looked at him now with a show of hesitation which was very pretty, but by no means necessary under the circumstances.

'What is it, dearest?' he asked again. 'You want something, I am sure?'

'Yes, I do,' with another shy glance at him, and very busy at the same time twisting her fingers in the braid of his coat. 'I want something very much; and I am wondering whether you will do it for me.'

'Of course I will, dear, if I can; how can you doubt it? Is it anything to be done now?'

'Well, not just this minute, exactly; but I should like to know about it. It's something for next week; and I have been thinking of it ever since you told me last night you would have to go to Hoole. Can't you guess what it is?'

'Not at all; unless, indeed—perhaps you want to go and stay with Janet while I am away.'

Lisa made a face of considerable disgust. 'Percy, how can you say such things! and when you know I don't like her!'

'No, but now Isabel and Nelly are there, it will be different. You would like being with them; and indeed, dear Lisa, even if that were not what you were going to propose, I think it would be the very best thing you could do. I don't at all like the idea of leaving you here alone.'

'No, that's the very thing, Percy,' and she hid her face on his shoulder; 'I don't want you to leave me, and that was just what I was going to ask you. Why won't you take me with you? it would make me so happy! I should be miserable here without you; and I don't want to go to Lassell Lodge. Let me go with you, please,' in a very coaxing tone.

Percy's face fell at this request. 'My dear Lisa, I wish I could. I would take you most willingly, if it were possible; but the fact is, it is simply out of the question. You have no idea what a place it is; there is not a lodging near, fit for you to go into. I asked about it yesterday; and everyone told me it would never do to take a lady there.'

Lisa looked extremely disappointed; but it was only for a moment. Her face brightened again.

'I dare say some people are a great deal more

particular than I am,' she said. 'I shouldn't care at all what sort of place I was in if I were with you, Percy; and I don't take up much room—you might put me anywhere almost. I wouldn't mind, too, how uncomfortable I was—I wouldn't grumble at anything—you may be quite sure of that. I should like any place if you would only let me go. Don't you think you will? Don't you think, at any rate, you are going to say you will think about it?' looking at him with one of her most winning smiles.

He smiled a little too—stroking her bright hair fondly in the meantime. He did not exactly see what good was likely to be done by thinking about it; but he could not for the life of him say 'no' to her, and there was no harm in promising to do what he could, though he was perfectly certain the thing was impracticable. Anything, however, was better than a downright refusal.

'Well, dear,' he said, after some consideration, 'I'll tell you what I'll do—I will go over this afternoon and have a look at the place; and if there's any sort of a lodging to be had, I will take it for you; if you really would rather put up with anything than be left behind. But I warn you that I am afraid there is not the least chance of my finding one; so you must promise me not to be very much disappointed if I don't succeed.'

'To be sure I will, Percy; and think it very good of

you to have tried. I won't say I shan't *feel* disappointed, because I want so much to go with you; but I won't say anything about it. I hope, though, you will be able to find some sort of a place, even if it's only a corner, to put me in; and I think you will. What time will you be back this evening, I wonder?'

'I don't know—not till late, very likely. I shall go directly I get away from the barracks, and you had better not expect me till you see me. You will have to make my excuses to Janet and the others, and tell them how it is. I can't put it off, as we go on Saturday.'

A reminder which made Lisa look very blank.

'Oh Percy, you must be sure and find some place for me. Fancy being away from you for a fortnight! What should I do? I couldn't bear to be left alone when we are always so happy together. And you don't want to leave me either, do you? Don't you like having me with you? You tell me sometimes that you do—you tell me I make a very nice little wife, and that you wouldn't part with me for anything. Isn't it true?'

'Yes, dearest, indeed it is. Ah, Lisa, if you knew half what you are to me! What should I do without you, my little summer-bird?'

'Summer-bird' was one of his pet names for her; and Lisa smiled.

'Well, you are not going to do without me—that was just why I was teasing you, because I want to go with

you instead of being left behind. No, there is not much fear of your getting rid of me at present—when you want to do so, you mustn't make me quite so happy as I am now. Do you know, Percy, I wonder sometimes whether there is anybody in the whole world so happy as we are. I don't believe there is—I don't think anyon can be. I am almost sorry Isabel and Nelly are here, and that we shan't be alone so much as we have been—our evenings especially have always been so very pleasant; and now I am afraid there will be an end of them, for some time at least. We must make the most of them while we are at Hoole.'

Percy looked at her anxiously. 'My dear Lisa, you are not going to build upon my being able to find any lodgings there? I have not the least hope of anything of the sort, and you have promised me you won't be disappointed if I don't. You will remember that? you won't be vexed if I don't?'

'No, of course not,' she said gaily; 'only I am sure you will, because you know how much I care about it;' in a tone of great confidence, which threw Percy into something like despair. He had no time, however, for any more attempts to convince her of the fallacy of her hopes, for the striking of the clock warned him that he ought to be off. With many injunctions to her, therefore, to take care of herself, and to be sure and not be dull during his absence, he went away; wondering in his own mind how she would take the disappointment

which he felt certain was in store for her, and dreading nothing so much as to see a cloud upon the bright face which, ever since they had been married, it had been his daily boast to himself had never once been crossed by even a passing shadow of sadness or vexation.

Isabel and Elinor came down, as they had promised, to spend the day at the cottage, walking in between ten and eleven, and Janet with them; although the latter did not mean to stay—she would return in the evening, she said, with Arthur; and they would come early, because Ralph was going out and she should be alone—whereupon Lisa told her of Percy's projected expedition, which seemed to entertain her greatly.

'He won't get any lodgings there,' she said. 'It is the most out-of-the-way place in the world. What is your fancy, my dear, for sending him on such a wild-goose chase? You are not obliged to go and bury yourself there, are you?'

'I am not obliged, but he is. They are going out surveying for some forts that are to be built there. He will often have to be away this summer, I am afraid; and he won't be back now for quite a fortnight, he says. It is such an immense time to be alone, you know.'

'So it is,' said Janet, with a laugh. 'And so you thought of going after him, did you? But you won't be able; it is quite out of the question. It is the most miserable, out-of-the-way place imaginable. I have been there once or twice—driven through it, for it is

rather pretty in that direction; and when I was staying with the Parkers they used to take me there sometimes. It is close to the sea—quite a village, and a very lonely one too; I don't suppose there's another for miles round; and as for getting lodgings there, you might as well look for them in the desert. Who would think of letting lodgings where there's nobody to take them? for no one would ever go there if they could possibly help it. Why it's nearly seven miles from any station, to begin with. How does Percy mean to get there?'

'I don't know—he didn't say. I suppose he'll go by train as far as he can, and walk the rest of the way.' And Lisa, who did not want to hear of any more difficulties in the way of the attainment of her wishes, dropped the subject very hastily, and called off Janet's attention to something else; much to the displeasure of Isabel, who thought she treated very lightly any trouble or inconvenience Percy might have in the matter, so long as she could get her own way in what was apparently a mere fancy. She made no remark, however, and when Janet went away, which she very soon did, the topic was not renewed, Atherstone news being discussed instead; and then Lisa had the happiness, to which she had long looked forward, of showing her new home to some one from the Priory. And if the place had been a palace, she could not have been prouder of it than she was; and the glee with which she went about displaying her treasures, and showing her many contrivances for

making the cottage one of the pleasantest dwellings that could well be imagined, was pretty to see. She was proud of everything—of her garden with its beautiful sea-view—of the house itself with its sheltering shrubs and overhanging creepers—of her little drawing-room with its tasteful arrangements, its ornaments and engravings, its flowers and books, its handsome piano—this last Percy's present to her when they had first returned from their wedding tour;—she was proud of all both within and without her home; and perhaps not the least proud of her own room, which, with its pale blue and white hangings, its pretty carpet and low couches, its cheval-glass and its dressing-table covered with all the appliances needful for a lady's toilette, formed no small contrast to her bare closet in the old house at Atherstone.

'Lane arranges all that for me,' she said, half apologetically, in answer to some remark of Isabel's as to much of what she saw there being by no means necessary. 'Lane arranges them all. She likes me to have things in that way, for she was used to it when —she lived with my mother,' she was about to have added; but something made her stop short, and for a moment there was a very evident shade upon her face. But Elinor took up a set of coral ornaments that lay on the table, and began admiring them, and she brightened up again.

'Yes, are they not pretty? Percy gave them me when we were in Paris. I saw them in a shop in the

Rue de la Paix, and thought them so exceedingly pretty that he bought them for me. I like them better almost than anything I have; though he has given me a great many other things too;' opening her dressing-case as she spoke, and displaying with childish delight her various possessions there—possessions so numerous, and some of them apparently of so much value, that Isabel grew very grave as she looked. What had her brother been about to be so lavish in his expenditure on his idol? Surely he might have known that such things were far from suitable either for his wife's age or station; and if anyone but Lisa had been concerned, he would have been the first to see the folly of such needless extravagance. She stood in silent vexation, while her cousin displayed, and Elinor admired.

'I am almost afraid now to say I like a thing,' Lisa said, 'for he is sure to get it for me if he can. He is so very kind. I don't mean only in giving me things,' she added, with a smile, 'but in every way. You don't know how very good he is! We are *so* happy.'

'And you never find it dull?' Elinor asked.

'No—yes,' she hesitated. 'A little, sometimes—that's the worst of it; the mornings are so very long. I'm all alone then, you know; and though I work, and practise, and do anything I can, the time never goes very fast. But I don't mind it so very much after all, for I'm always looking forward to the afternoon; that makes up for everything. We go out then; sometimes for a

walk or a long drive into the country; and sometimes we go on the beach and sit down there among the rocks, and he reads to me. I do like that—it's so pleasant to sit just within sound of the waves, and listen to things one cares for. And then in the evening I play to him, or else he reads to me again while I work. When we first came here, we used to go out a great deal in the evening, but we don't now nearly so much; and I must say I like our home evenings the best. I like having Percy all to myself.'

Poor Lisa, the words came out innocently enough, but they were no sooner uttered than she saw she had made a mistake. Elinor, indeed, only laughed; but Isabel, though she said nothing, turned away to the window, and stood looking out with an air which told most unmistakably what her thoughts were; and Lisa's momentary embarrassed silence showed she had understood the movement. She closed her dressing-case rather hastily, and suggested a visit to Lane downstairs —a proposition to which Elinor at once acceded. Isabel, however, declined it. She was tired, she said; and instead of accompanying them, she returned to the drawing-room, where she established herself with a book, and for the rest of the morning saw but little of her sister and cousin. She heard their voices about the garden, but although Lisa came in several times with an entreaty to her to join them, or an offer to come and sit with her, both were as often declined. She preferred being alone, she said; and alone she sat until some

callers disturbed her solitude, and brought her cousin in from the garden to see them. But even then she did not exert herself to talk or to be agreeable. Though no one could be a pleasanter companion than Isabel when she liked, she was preoccupied now, and only intent upon watching Lisa, whose prettily shy manner and heightened colour, though in keeping with her extreme youth, were not what she would have wished to see in her brother's wife. They were too childish—not self-possessed enough; and yet even when criticising her cousin's want of style and of womanliness, she blamed her still more for the approach to lightness and coquetry, which now, as often before, she thought she detected in her manner. But, prejudiced as she was, it was no wonder, perhaps, that she did not understand Lisa—that she misconstrued into a lower motive her anxiety to please; and that even when that anxiety was shown at times in which no one could accuse her of vanity, it did not satisfy her. She could not be pleased even with the attempts that were made to please herself.

Lisa breathed a long sigh, which sounded very like one of relief, when her visitors were gone, and then she turned to her cousin.

'You are not well, Isabel, are you? Does your head ache?' she asked.

A rebuke to her for her unsociability, Isabel considered the question, and she answered rather shortly, 'Not at all, thank you.'

'You are tired, then?'

'Not very—a little,' and she took up again the book she had been reading.

Lisa looked at her for a moment, and then she went away. But it was only for a few minutes, to ask Lane to let them have some tea; and she came back so eager to wait upon her cousin, and so anxious for her to have everything just as she liked, that it was quite a pity Isabel should have appeared so little pleased, and have looked so very grave as she did. But it really seemed as if she had not the power of being otherwise; and when later on in the afternoon her sister and cousin again went out, intending to go for a walk on the beach before Janet and Arthur joined them for the evening, she once more declined to accompany them. This time, however, when left alone, she did not read. She sat still instead, lost in thought, watching the deep swell of the sea, and the light upon the hills beyond the bay—the light from her own face fading away while she looked, and in its stead a darkness gathering; a reflection, perhaps, of the dark sad thoughts that were filling her soul within.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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